

OBSERVATIONS ON THE
EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION,
AND HABITS OF THE BLIND



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OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, AND HABITS
OF
THE BLIND

WITH
A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF THE BENEFITS OF THE
ASYLUM AND SCHOOL SYSTEMS

“ Nothing is easier than to make the blind perform extraordinary feats, by accustoming them to conquer difficulties apparently insurmountable ; but what advantage would such useless employments be to them ? ”

Guillié, Superintendent of the School for the Blind, Paris.

BY
THOMAS ANDERSON

LATE MANAGER OF THE ASYLUM FOR THE BLIND, EDINBURGH : AND MASTER OF THE
WILBERFORCE MEMORIAL SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND, YORK

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1895

TO
ROBERT JOHNSTON, ESQ.,

HONORARY SECRETARY OF THE ASYLUM FOR THE BLIND, EDINBURGH,

WHOSE PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE
AND UNWEARIED LABOURS
IN THE CAUSE
OF THAT CLASS OF OUR FELLOW-MEN,
CONTINUED THROUGHOUT A SERIES OF THIRTY YEARS,
WILL SECURE TO HIM
THE LASTING GRATITUDE
OF THOSE FOR WHOM HE HAS DONE SO MUCH,
AS WELL AS OF THE COMMUNITY,
IN WHICH HE HAS, DURING A LONG LIFE,
ACTED AN
HONOURABLE, PROMINENT, AND HIGHLY-BENEFICIAL PART:

THESE OBSERVATIONS,
ON A SUBJECT SO NEAR HIS HEART,
ARE, MOST RESPECTFULLY, AND AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR.

ADVERTISEMENT.

HAVING, within these few years past, been several times requested to give a general outline of the plan pursued at the asylum for the blind with which I had the happiness of being so long connected, preparatory to the establishment of others in this country, and one on the Continent; I have been induced to embody the whole in a more permanent form. An unwonted interest in behalf of the blind has, within these few years, displayed itself, and several munificent bequests have recently been left for the endowment of such institutions. I shall be happy if the following pages do, in any degree, aid the inquiries of those into whose hands these funds have been committed.

I feel happy in having an opportunity thus publicly to express how much I am indebted for all I know on the subject to ROBERT JOHNSTON, Esq., of Edinburgh, to whom these pages are inscribed. Not only have the plans which he suggested secured employment to the blind, to an extent both as it regards production and sale, beyond any institution of the kind in the kingdom, but he was the first in this country who engrafted, if I may so call it, nearly twenty years ago, on the merely mechanical pursuits common to all such establishments, the admirable system of intellectual education which has caused it to stand out as a model to others,—a system in every way

fitted to meet the wants of those blind, who have to gain their livelihood by their labour, yet are, at the same time, capable of being instructed in much calculated to raise them in the scale of society. His aid, his counsel, his patient consideration of any proposal I had occasion to lay before him, and his readiness to give me the weight of his authority, made the period I passed in that institution one of perfect smoothness. And it will always give me the greatest pleasure to think of the amicable feeling which existed between the directors and myself, unbroken, as it was, even by a single difference of opinion. To this aid, and to this unity, it is, that, with special reference to "Him who has the hearts of all men in his hand," I owe all the happiness I experienced, as well as the success which attended my efforts in fulfilling the duties then committed to me.

*School for the Blind, York,
August 30, 1837.*

OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT
OF
THE BLIND.

WITHIN these few years there appears to have arisen a feeling on behalf of the blind, which contrasts strongly with the apathy and neglect this interesting class of our fellow-men had previously experienced. The last ten years has done much for them both at home and abroad; and there are good grounds for saying that the next ten will do as much, if not more. Nothing in the way of an educational institution seems to have been thought of for them until about 1785, when the school at Paris was opened under the auspices of Louis XVI.; and the immediate superintendence of the celebrated Haüy. But, such was the success of this seminary, that an immediate movement took place towards the amelioration of their condition, and the governments of Russia, Prussia, and Austria followed in the same line, by the establishment of similar institutions in their respective capitals.

In our own country the same feeling showed itself by the school at Liverpool being opened in 1791. The asylum at Edinburgh and the school at Bristol followed in 1793. That of London, 1799, and Norwich in 1805.

After this the blind seem to have been nearly forgotten, as it was not until 1828 that the asylum at Glasgow commenced its operations, since which period several have been opened in the United States, viz.:—one at Boston, another at New York, and a third at Philadelphia.

In 1835 the Committee appointed to carry into effect the wishes of the subscribers to a memorial in remembrance of the excellent Wilberforce, opened the Yorkshire school for the blind, while another, combining also the instruction of the deaf and dumb, commenced operations at Belfast in 1833.

No less than *four* others are at this moment projected in our own country—at Manchester, London, Aberdeen, and Dundee. The first will very soon open as an ASYLUM, on a scale fully equal to any. This has been accomplished by the munificent bequest of Thomas Henshaw, Esq., of Oldham, joined to a large subscription by the inhabitants of Manchester. The second will arise from the largest bequest ever made for such a purpose, that of the late Mr. Day, of London, who left £100,000 for the endowment of an asylum for the blind. While the third and fourth are from considerable sums left recently for like purposes. Seeing then that so much is likely to be done it is an important question, how shall these ample means be disposed of, so as to secure the greatest amount of benefit to the blind as a body—keeping clear of the mere show of the continental schools on the one hand, and on the other, the equal error of making no provision for their intellectual training.

It is a striking feature in our own institutions that they are all the result of private charity, while those on the Continent are supported wholly or in part by their respective governments. The American establishments have also shared largely in the funds of the local states—these

grants, at least that of Boston, being connected with the right to present a certain number of pupils.

It is, however, to be questioned, whether institutions mainly supported by national funds, are so efficient as those of the other description. While, on the other hand, a grant even to a trifling amount, *in proportion to the number educated* would prove a great benefit. This of course would be accompanied, as in similar cases, with the patronage of so many appointments: and if only such in amount as to prove an *aid*, not an *independence*, could be obtained, the benefit arising to the indigent blind would be very great.*

There is not the least doubt that the institutions for the

* The very partial endowments of schoolmaster-ships in Scotland is all that is wanted in the way of proof (to those who object to such grants on the score of engendering evil) as to the truly beneficial results which might fairly be anticipated. They have as much as will keep them from starving, but they must work well and hard if they desire to live comfortably. I merely throw out this as a hint, and would be glad to see it followed up by some one better able to do it. How desirable is it that a few of those many thousands at the disposal of Parliament, should be appropriated to the *help* of those institutions whose aim is to ameliorate the condition of those four classes of suffering humanity, whose claims upon our sympathy no one will call in question, viz.:—the insane—the incurable—the blind—and the deaf and dumb. No one will inflict upon himself that which would entitle him to relief from any such institution, however well endowed, and in this, as it has been well and eloquently argued by Dr. Chalmers, lies all the security possible that such funds would not be abused. “Men,” says this distinguished writer, “will become voluntarily poor, but they will not become voluntarily blind or deaf, or maimed, or lunatic. It is thus, that while an asylum for want creates more objects than it can satisfy, an asylum for disease creates none, but may meet all and satisfy all. It is a disgrace to our philanthropic age, if infirmaries, or dispensaries, or asylums, whether for the cure of mental and bodily disease, or for keeping of that which is incurable, are left to languish for want of support, or compelled to stop short, ere the necessity for which they were instituted has been fully and finally overtaken.”—*Political Economy*, p. 418.

blind throughout the country have already done much good. Some of them are amply provided for; while others have had much to do to carry on, chiefly from the numbers seeking relief at their hands. Still the benefit conferred on the great mass of the blind is but small, when it is recollected that the number of these amounts to about *twenty-six thousand*. However general this estimate may be (and it is confessedly so, owing to the imperfect data on which it is founded), still it may warrant the assertion that a great deal remains to be done, particularly for that portion of them (forming by far the majority) who must, in some way or other, be dependent on impoverished friends or parishes, viz., the indigent blind.

From the information contained in an interesting article on the education of the blind, in the *North American Review* for July, 1833, we have some valuable particulars on this subject. The writer says, "In several countries in Europe, the census gives accurately the number of the blind. In the centre of Europe it is about 1 in 800; in Austria, 1 in 845; in Switzerland, 1 in 747; in Denmark, 1 in 1000; in Prussia, 1 in 900; and in France, 1 in 1050." The average of these gives 1 in 890, and if we take the same rate as applicable to Great Britain and Ireland, then the population, being just upon 25 millions, the number of blind will be nearly 28,000.* The first attempt

* At the close of the Report of the Society of Arts at Edinburgh on printing for the blind (1836), amongst other suggestions relative to this class the following is deserving of particular attention. "That the ministers throughout Scotland be solicited to ascertain the number of blind persons in their respective parishes—the causes of their blindness—how they are occupied—the age at which they became blind—and how many could read previous to their blindness." A request of this kind, combining with a return of the deaf and dumb, would doubtless meet a ready compliance on the part of the clergy. It would have formed an appropriate item in the *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, now in course of publication.

made in this country to ascertain the precise number of the blind in a given district, has recently been made by the committee of the school for the blind, York. In the first report of that institution, just published, the indefatigable chairman, the Rev. W. Vernon Harcourt, has laid before the subscribers and the public, not only a report teeming with interest, but has accompanied it with an elaborate digest of about *seven hundred* returns from parishes in the county of York, of the numbers, ages, &c., of the interesting class alluded to. This the reverend author unassumingly denominates a "preface." But, to those who are at all conversant with the subject, it cannot but assume a much more important place, being neither more nor less than a census of the blind in the large and very populous county just mentioned,—indeed, quite a *desideratum*. Almost all the countries on the Continent have a census of the blind—but Great Britain has none : and the document alluded to, emanating from what may now be called a provincial town, is the first of the kind of which our country can boast.

It is not my intention to enter into any detailed account of the respective institutions. But having given my attention to the subject these ten years past, and having carefully observed the practical working of one of the oldest, and confessedly most efficient in the kingdom, though unfortunately but little known—that at Edinburgh,—and seeing there are no less than four institutions of a similar kind in prospect, with means at their disposal commensurate with much good, I mean to confine myself to some particulars whereby to show the vast advantage arising to the blind themselves, as well as to the funds devoted to their benefit, from the adoption of the ASYLUM system, as compared with that of the SCHOOL system.

In the outset of this it is worthy of remark, that the

institutions in England and Ireland are all *schools*, while those of Scotland are *asylums**—better described, perhaps, by saying institutions for the *education and employment*, but, with the exception of the junior members, not residence, of the blind. The only explanation I can offer for this difference is, the necessity our northern friends are under of taking the most economical mode of doing the most good; though they may thereby be obliged to forego much of that not very valuable eclat, which arises from the other. And when I state, quoting from the speech of the Rev. W. Vernon Harcourt, at the first meeting of the subscribers to the Wilberforce school for the blind, that “the annual expenditure of the school in London, exclusive of articles of manufacture, for which there is a return, is £4000; and the annual expenditure of the institution at Liverpool is £3000,”—the number of *pupils* being in each about the same—100 to 110;—while the *asylum* at Edinburgh maintains nearly *a like number of blind*, as well as the wives and children dependent on about one-third of the number, which equal that, if it does not exceed, on much less than £1000, there surely is room for the inquiry,—What are the principles, the working of which produce such very different results, bearing in mind, too, that there is pursued at the northern asylums constant and most efficient plans for the *intellectual* education of those under their charge, which have as yet found no place in the others?

* In the very excellent article “Instruction of the Blind,” in the Penny Cyclopædia—by far the best I have seen on the subject in the department of our literature to which it belongs—I was surprised to see it stated that “the evidence of the fact that blindness is no insurmountable obstacle to the acquisition of knowledge has not led to a proper system—*asylums* having been provided rather than *institutions*—places of abode rather than of instruction.” The reverse of this with the exceptions stated is the correct statement: as, indeed, may be gathered from the interesting particulars contained in the article itself.

Connected as I was for eight years with the asylum at Edinburgh, and having thereby had the advantage of observing the plans adopted for the education of the blind, as well as the no less important modes whereby they may be profitably employed, I trust I shall be in some measure enabled to answer the question proposed.

It is much to be regretted that Mr. Johnston, whose long and active connexion with the institution qualified him above all others to do so, did not come forward at a much earlier period with a development of the views which regulated the charity for which he has exerted himself so much. Had he done so, he would undoubtedly have occupied a place which, in consequence of his blameable reluctance, has been, in a limited degree, occupied by others; while all the institutions of a like kind in the country would have had before them details in every way beneficial to their funds, as well as to the best interests of those under their care. In lieu of any such, we have only the usual newspaper notices of the annual examinations, which took place from time to time. These excited much, but perhaps too local an interest; and being altogether devoid of those pecuniary details which would have brought its economical and truly efficient management at once before the public, these notices served little else than the purpose of the passing day.

It gives me much pleasure, however, to refer to the excellent report made to the directors of the Boston institution by Dr. Howe, in 1833. That gentleman had been sent over to Europe to visit all the institutions for the blind, preparatory to opening one there. In this document he says, he "engaged one teacher from Paris, and another from Edinburgh. The institution at Edinburgh is, on the whole, the best I saw in Europe. It comes nearer than any other to the attainment of the

great object of such institutions, viz., enabling the inmates to support themselves by their own efforts. The establishment is not so showy as that at Paris, nor has it the same means* the latter possesses (which receives an allowance of 60,000 francs per annum from government), nor has it printed books for their use. *Still they receive most excellent education*, and learn some most useful trades. The mattress and mat making are carried on by the blind there with great skill and success." Again, he observes, "The asylum at Edinburgh is certainly superior to any in England, and on the whole is so to that of Paris, and were it in place I might detail many curious and interesting processes for facilitating the education of the blind: the general principle, however, is to *combine intellectual and physical* education in such a way as to qualify them for the performance of a useful part in the world; *and of so storing the mind with knowledge*, that they may have a fund within themselves from which to draw in after life." The writer of the article in the North American Review for July, 1833, formerly quoted, who appears to have visited the European institutions, observes of the one now spoken of—"It is decidedly of a higher order than any other in England; and it is one of its merits, that the fabrication of the articles we have just mentioned (mattresses, baskets, rugs, &c.) *chiefly* occupies the attention of the inmates, and have quite as good an appearance as any made in the city; enjoying at the same time a well-merited reputation of being stronger and more durable," they command the highest market price.

To the same purpose the author of the article on the

* It is barely able to carry on, from its being so long the only establishment of the kind in Scotland, and has scarcely any capital. Subscriptions are its sole reliance

Instruction of the Blind, in the Penny Cyclopædia, says—
 “The whole machinery (of the Edinburgh Asylum) seems to be of a high order. From its admirable management, it may be inferred that there exists both the disposition and the capability to make it all that could be wished as an establishment for the blind.” Who the author of the article is I do not know. In it, however, he has certainly furnished us with something approaching to a desideratum—an account of our own institutions.

I hope to be able to show that these estimates of this institution are not over-rated, and that the principles on which it is conducted have done much towards the amelioration of those labouring under the deprivation of sight, and this combined with the least possible expenditure.

There can be no doubt that in proportion as we economise the funds of an institution, the great body of the blind are benefited, by aid being extended to a larger number; but *in practice* this obvious rule seems almost to have been lost sight of. When to this is conjoined the great error of mistaking, or fondly representing in glowing language, the *possibilities of the few*, as the *real and daily operations of the many*, the amount of hindrance to their actual benefit has been great indeed.

In short, the question seems all along to have been, *What CAN they do?* rather than *What OUGHT they to do?* On this point who can read the touching sentiments of Dr. Blacklock, himself one of the class, without at once feeling their force? “Were men to judge of things by their intrinsic value, less would be expected from the blind than from others. But, by some pernicious and unaccountable prejudice, people generally hope to find them either possessed of preternatural talents, or more attentive to those they have than others. Hence, it unluckily happens, that blind men, who in common life are too

often regarded as raree-shows, when they do not gratify the extravagant expectations of the spectators, too often sink in the general opinion, and appear much less considerable and meritorious than they really are. This general diffidence of their power, at once deprives them both of opportunity and spirit to exert themselves; and they descend at last to that degree of insignificance in which the public estimate has fixed them."

In the following pages I shall make some observations on the two systems pursued—that of the school and the asylum—on the employments and results of each—on the education of the blind—and conclude with some notices of the pursuits, habits, and peculiarities which distinguish them.

The design of *schools* for the blind is to instruct young persons for a few years, and then let them go to provide for themselves as well as they can. On the other hand, that of an *asylum* is not only to *teach* them, but to *employ them after they are taught*—dependent, of course, on their own wish to remain, and good conduct, as in any other working establishment.

The first method is founded on the idea that they *can do as much out of the house as in it*, or nearly so, joined with the desire to spread the benefit of the institution as much as possible. The second proceeds on the assumption that they—at least the *far greater proportion*—*cannot do so*, and that the funds of the charity will go a great deal farther, and much more thoroughly provide for those enjoying its benefit, than the principle of a school can do.

I am quite aware how it "strikes a stranger" when he enters a school for the blind:—"Well, this is delightful—who would have believed it! How very nicely they get on!—and such a blessing to be enabled to do for

themselves—how cheerful, how happy!” No feeling mind can look on such a scene without indulging in such thoughts. But, let that stranger—and I would also invite the directors of such institutions—look forward to a few years, when these young people will all have been dispersed to their several villages, crowded lanes, or hovels! Visit them there in the mind’s eye—visit them in detail, one after another—and where is the bright vision and glowing anticipations excited by the appearance of the same children when at school? The charm is gone. All the adaptations so well fitted to bring out the feelings described have disappeared, and it is found at last that the excitement and benevolence called forth while perambulating the extensive and comfortable premises of a *school* are one thing, while those called forth by viewing a succession of those very pupils, after they have left the institution, are quite another—perhaps I do not go too far in saying, a melancholy contrast. Some may be inclined to say that the same observation applies to any large school or public charity for education, and that the same reasoning would go to prove the necessity of keeping all children permanently on the funds. I think not. Every pupil leaves school *with those powers entire* which enable him to take his place in the world on an equality with those around him. Not so the blind, even when educated. They labour under a privation which wholly disqualifies them for taking a similar place. By their being trained in schools, they can get nearer it by a step or so; but by being brought together, and employed within the precincts of an asylum, they can make a far closer approximation. One exception alone can be made, but that is a decided one—I mean as to music. This is the solitary branch which they can cultivate with any hope of *competing* successfully; but it is one which could be easily grafted on

the system of an asylum at very little expense, and with manifest advantage to such an institution. In any remarks, therefore, which I may hereafter make, on the inefficiency of the school system, I would wish the exception now made to be kept in view.

In proof of what I have just said, I shall adduce, from among many others, a case of very recent occurrence, and I do it as presenting a fair average: some may be better, and some worse, but I consider it one well calculated to bring out what is meant.

A girl was sent very lately to a school at the age of fourteen. She had lost her sight when an infant, and her parents, however willing, burdened as they were with four or five children, could do little for her benefit. When she entered the institution she could not put on her own clothes, and of anything like information, or ideas beyond her immediate and most humble wants, she was totally destitute! In a fortnight she could dress herself completely, much to her own delight. Possessed of a lively temper, and good capacity, she soon acquired plain knitting, a little arithmetic,* committed to memory portions of the Scriptures, some psalms and hymns, and was, on the whole, proceeding remarkably well, when, after a year's stay, she was removed, owing to her parents being unable to afford the sum requisite. Being in the town where she resides, a few weeks after she went home, I called upon her. I found her just as might be expected—wholly idle, sitting on a low stool by the fire, in an apartment where she could not move three steps with freedom, and in a locality which afforded not one step of a walk to her with safety. All she had acquired had become nearly useless; and as to fancy-knitting, it was out of the question, in such a place, without means and still more without the help which,

* By means of the Pentagon Arithmetic Board, afterwards to be noticed.

although but little, is still absolutely necessary to enable one in her circumstances to go on. Not a thing around her—scarcely an idea of those about her—was suited to her situation. While in the institution she had acquired new tastes, almost new feelings, from being able to do something really useful. But all had passed away like a dream; and she was left, I would almost say, worse than when she was withdrawn from her obscurity. She had tasted the happiness of being associated with companions under similar circumstances, all of them delighted at the new powers which they found themselves possessed of; they felt they were much nearer to the great mass of those around them than they had imagined; and that by a little care and a little attention, they could reach them in many things, and approach in all. They had besides become objects of public attention and approval; they felt they possessed a place in society, however humble; and that the barrier which had so long stood between them and the seeing world they had heard so much of, was not quite so insurmountable as they had supposed it to be. But, separated from the institution, how much of all this was left to the young person spoken of? Scarcely a shred. She falls back, in one short hour, from all the comforts which surrounded her, upon impoverished friends, or, in all likelihood, sooner or later, on the miseries of the workhouse! Of her, and of all such, may we not adopt the language of the reviewer formerly quoted, when speaking of the failures of the school at Paris?—"The pupil has drank at the fountain of knowledge long enough to create a painful thirst for its waters, which cannot be gratified; he has lived in ease only long enough to make penury doubly dreary; and his mind has been so elevated as to make a feeling of dependence the source of wretchedness."

It may be said—"Well, but this girl was only a short time at school. Had she been allowed to remain a few years, it would have been otherwise, and it is not right to draw a general inference from an extreme case."

Had it been either a solitary or an extreme case, I *would not* have brought it forward. I adduce it as an *average* case, and only one among many I know. I have seen several leave the asylum at Edinburgh of their own accord, under the idea that they could do better, or at least as well, out of it. Others had been dismissed for bad conduct. All of them had been many years in the house, and most of them good workmen. One of them, a steady, well-behaved man, having a wife and two children, opened, by the assistance of his friends, a little shop in a large market town. He attempted to carry on the basket and rope-mat making, while his wife aided by the sale of crockery. But he was not six months out of the institution until every endeavour was made on the part of his friends to get him reinstated in his old berth and his 9s. a week, which, after much difficulty (from the crowded state of the house), was at length accomplished. He had, however, lost every shilling, become indebted for rent, materials, &c., and long struggled under the effects of his laudable but ill-advised attempt.

Another young man, also of excellent character, made the same experiment. He left with the same idea in his head as the preceding case. He opened a shop in a populous manufacturing town—the very best field whereon such an attempt can be made. He persevered two or three years, surrounded with difficulties, and unhappily added to them by getting married—a step which is almost sure to follow in the great majority of cases. After a long struggle, he also made every effort to get readmitted; but, however willing the directors

were to accede, the state of the funds, as well as the pressure of applications, forbade compliance.

Another very striking case has just come to my knowledge, which I cannot omit. It is that of a man who spent four years in one of the most celebrated schools, and acquired a knowledge of mat-making and sack-weaving. In an application made to another institution for employment, he says that from the difficulty of procuring material, as well as of finding a market,—although resident for several years past in a populous shipping town,—he would willingly pay ten pounds premium to be admitted to teach or work, receiving only his board and clothing in return—looking for no wages.

Still it may be objected that I have adduced local cases not calculated to go far when brought to bear against a system. To meet this, I shall then quote two testimonies, which will carry with them, I have no doubt, very considerable weight. In the report of the Dublin (Richmond National Institution) school for the blind, for 1833, the committee say, they “have not merely to lament the limited aid received from those places whose industrious blind have been, in so large a proportion, benefited by the institution;—they have also heard with pain, that pupils who had acquired a proficiency in one or more trades, and had been discharged from the institution with a good character, and a considerable sum in earnings, have been suffered, on returning to their homes, *to languish for that support and encouragement to which they were so eminently entitled; their funds have been gradually exhausted, and too frequently they have reappeared in Dublin,* to add to a mass of poverty already excessive; a result the more to be regretted as it is believed there are few provincial towns where one or other of the trades taught in the institution would not fail to secure a livelihood, were a

friendly countenance shown to the blind proficient." And what is it that brings relief to the committee under this melancholy picture of the result of their endeavours?—"It is, however, hoped," they continue, "that amongst the first measures devised for the relief of the poor of Ireland, this class, so deserving of public commiseration, will have that full care and provision to which it is so justly entitled"; which, in other words, expresses a hope that these "proficients" will be provided for as paupers.

Again, at a meeting held in Manchester, in March, 1834, relative to the erection of the asylum there, now so soon to be opened, the committee state in their report that they "have been informed that the trustees of the Liverpool institution *have long felt the want of an ASYLUM* for such blind persons *as were unable to obtain their own livelihood*;" and farther state, that having "proceeded to procure the regulations of the schools or asylums for the blind, established at London, Liverpool, and Edinburgh, the result of the information derived from these sources of information was, A CONVICTION ON THEIR MINDS, that it would be inexpedient, at present, to connect *a school of instruction* with the intended asylum;"—assigning as reasons for this opinion, "the abundant facilities" of the school at Liverpool—"the *great expense* which must be incurred in the appointment of masters for the purpose of teaching trades, and the *positive loss* to the institution with which they are attended."

A very prevalent argument in favour of the school system is, that there is a *succession of pupils* received, taught, and dismissed, enabled to provide for themselves: while, by the other plan, the whole good of the institution is centred in the favoured few who can, once for all, gain admission: therefore the great body of the blind are left out. This is much more plausible than correct. By

observation, it is ascertained that from seven to ten per cent. per annum leave (in one way and another), or die out of an establishment of the kind, *thereby making room for a corresponding number*. Were asylums only a little more numerous, and the system of *employment* rather than the system of mere tuition adopted, this ratio would be found beyond the demands of the blind. It must also be kept in view, that by the former system nearly three times the number will be provided for, as compared with a school; *supposing a proper field be chosen for the ready disposal of their work; and that the articles manufactured be sold at a price not higher than they can be had elsewhere*.

As an additional corroboration of these views, I would adduce the evidence of the author of the article in the North American Review already referred to. He has drawn as glowing a picture as the most imaginative could desire of the aspect of the Parisian institution. All is represented (for he speaks from personal observation) as delightful — joyous — sportive — and interesting. One would almost be inclined to think that the picture had been thus highly coloured that it might stand the stronger out in contrast with the succeeding paragraph. But that I may not be accused of giving a partial view of his observations, or only that portion of them which tends to support my own sentiments, I shall transcribe the whole:—

“In the institution for the young blind (between the ages of ten and fourteen), there are one hundred of these interesting beings, and a more delightful spectacle cannot be imagined than a view of its interior. You see not there the listless, helpless blind man, dozing away his days in a chimney nook, or groping his uncertain way about the house; but you hear the hum of busy voices,—you see the workshops filled with active boys, learning their trades

from others as blind as themselves,—you see the school-room crowded with eager listeners, taught by blind teachers. When they take their books, you see the awakened intellect gleam from their smiling faces, and, as they pass their fingers rapidly over the leaves, their varying countenances bespeak the varying emotions which the words of the author awaken. When the bell rings, they start away to the play-ground,—run along the alleys at full speed,—chase, overtake, and tumble each other about,—and shout and laugh and caper round with all the careless heartfelt glee of boyhood. But a richer treat and better sport awaits them; the bell again strikes, and away they all hurry to the hall of music; each one brings his instrument, and takes his place; they are all there—the soft flute and the shrill fife—the hautboy and horn—the cymbal and drum—with clarionet, viol, and violin;—and now they roll forth their volume of sweet sounds, and the singers, treble, bass, and tenor, striking in with exact harmony, swell it into one loud hymn of gratitude and joy, which are displayed in the rapturous thrill of their voices, and painted in the glowing enthusiasm of their animated countenances.”

What can go beyond this? The most enthusiastic advocate for the school system could not wish for a description more calculated to obtain a verdict in its favour. Let us, however, carefully mark what follows:—

“Such is the scene which presents itself to the delighted visitant of the Parisian institution; and he comes away with a feeling of unqualified admiration for that spirit of humanity which, guided by science, is there accomplishing so much in defiance of the apparently insurmountable obstacles of nature. But he who goes again, and again, and examines not only the foliage and the flower, but waits for the season of the fruit, finds his admiration

dwindling into doubt, and feels at last the painful conviction, that all this *display is of comparative little good*, and that *not one-half the benefit* that might be derived from such splendid means ever accrues to the unfortunate inmates. He asks the question—How many of those who leave the institution at the expiration of their time are enabled to gain their own livelihood?—and is startled at the answer, ‘NOT ONE IN TWENTY!’ What then? Must they relapse into their former inanition? Must they take their places by the highwayside, and beg at the corner of the streets, with the pangs of dependence sharpened to torture by increased sensibility? Alas! *it is as bad as this with many*. And how is it proposed to remedy this evil; how do they hope to prevent the glimmering which the blind here catch of happiness, from being followed by a futurity doubly dark and wretched? Why, instead of looking for the cause of the evil,—instead of suspecting the *system*, and correcting *that*,—they propose to establish a place for the permanent reception and support of those who come out from the institution, and who cannot provide for themselves. This,” concludes the reviewer, “is very like educating men for the almshouse.” *

Never was there a juster view taken of the glittering, unsubstantial, and delusive system under consideration, whether to be seen at Paris or in England; and while I would acquit our own institutions of a like kind from much of the Parisian leaven, consisting, as it does, according to the writer just quoted, in making all go through the same routine of work and music, there is also, on the other hand, a far too near approximation to it in some of recent date. The remedy proposed, as above, is the very thing wanted; but it by no means follows that the asylum

* North American Review, July, 1833.

is to become an almshouse. Whether it does so or not, depends solely *on the way in which those so to be provided for may be prepared for it*. If by the tinsel, so strikingly set before us by this animated writer, then let us share in the melancholy tone of his climax ; but, if they are really brought up to that which is identified with the daily wants of an immense metropolis, or of a busy, stirring, district of country, in place of those which are forced upon the sight-seeking visitor, then would there be ample reason to hail the opening of an ASYLUM for the blind in the French capital. If it is even near the fact that NINETEEN-TWENTIETHS of the inmates are not benefited, in what stronger language can we state the uselessness of the system there pursued ? But how does the reviewer propose to remedy “the system” of which he so justly complains ? “It is alleged that (in the British institutions) the pupils, being all indigent, must depend solely upon the labour of their hands for their livelihood ; but we maintain that this is a *false* (wrong ?) *view of the subject*, and we shall endeavour to show that, on this principle (which has been followed hitherto in all the institutions), FEWER blind persons will be made competent to their own support than might be by following *an opposite one*.” In short, he sets aside handicraft occupation, as that in which the blind cannot *compete*, and presses their being instructed in “music, mathematics, and languages,” as affording the desirable field whereon they may gain a competency. — “Manual labour,” he concludes, should be considered as the “*dernier ressort*, the forlorn hope of the blind, and such only should be put to it, as cannot expect to attain excellence in the occupations” he had already recommended. He laments the little prospect they have, even in this way, of providing for themselves, as “machinery defies competition ;” but they must be sanguine indeed, who can ever hope to see

the blind (as a body) succeed in gaining even a niche in that world of talent, which with its intellectual machinery, is more than commensurate to meet all the demands upon it for "music, mathematics, and languages,"—the machinery intellectual appears to me on the one hand just as destructive of these hopes respecting the blind as the machinery mechanical is on the other,—while, in addition to the mere circumstance of the *supply* being, in our day, beyond the *demand*, it cannot be denied that, foolish and cruel as the feeling may be, there does exist a strong prejudice against the blind *as teachers*. This, I believe, no one will deny, however much it may be regretted.

If this fact of the *constant change* occurring in an asylum were more kept in view, it would do away with much of the idea, that only a limited number of the blind are benefited. I have little doubt that the number of such institutions will increase: and that, ere long, we shall see every city and large town in the kingdom having its Blind Asylum, just as they can at present boast of their Infirmarys.

But here, let it be strongly impressed, that every such institution ought to be strictly in proportion *to the probable demand for the work the blind can furnish*. To erect an asylum in an inconsiderable town where little can be sold, would be a waste of funds. No doubt it might become rich, and have no difficulty whatever in supporting its inmates, but I am speaking of doing so, in such a way, as to make the blind nearly support themselves. Now, looking at London and Edinburgh, as to population, the former ought to give employment to TEN such asylums as the one at the latter, and that at a low estimate. Thus at least ONE THOUSAND blind would be constantly employed and educated in the Metropolis alone,* and if as many of

* The school there contains about 120 pupils.

these had wives and children dependent on them as there are at Edinburgh, then, at least another thousand human beings would be creditably provided for. This is no theory. The thing is done, and has been in existence many years. But I shall recur to this point afterwards.

By the nearest estimate which has yet been formed (as before stated), of the total number of blind in the United Kingdom, it is thought to be about 28,000 of all ages. Allowing that one-fourth of these are unfit from age to do anything, and another fourth under the age of ten, we have then 14,000 remaining. But from this amount, we must deduct, say, three thousand who are in the middle and wealthier classes, therefore not objects for such institutions; still we have to find tuition and employment for the very large number of ELEVEN THOUSAND. And is there not ample means in our large towns to meet this demand? There certainly is, if proper attention were but turned to the subject. At least, a very great deal more might be done than has yet been effected. The Metropolis itself presents by far the most important field. To this moment it remains almost unoccupied, while, as before stated, it could in all probability find ample and *constant employment* for ten times the number of those at present under tuition, at the school in St. George's Fields.

Again, in the populous and busy districts of Yorkshire, for instance, at Leeds and Hull, highly favourable situations might be found for the employment of the blind of the county: while in Manchester, it is probable that a system somewhat akin to that advocated in these pages, will soon be made; and, under the direction of gentlemen so thoroughly acquainted with business, as that community boasts, the best results may be confidently expected—results which *cannot* be looked for from the school system, however well conducted.

These, and such like districts, present very peculiar facilities for the object in view, in respect of the great demand for all kinds of heavy basket work used in the mills, as well as the domestic baskets in constant demand. Rope and twine spinning is another branch of business which would of itself employ many hands. It forms a principal item in the sales of the Asylum at Glasgow, and from specimens put into my hands lately by Mr. Alston, the spirited treasurer of that institution, the *finish* is equal to any in the market. An equally extensive branch wholly unknown in schools is MATTRESS making. This alone gives employment, at the asylum in Edinburgh, to not less than about thirty of the inmates—the sales of this article alone amount to nearly £2,000.

When visiting one of the most celebrated schools, I was surprised to see that there were but two or three hands employed on baskets for domestic use, a branch which constitutes by far the greater part of any basket maker's business. The reason assigned was, "They had no demand for such—visitors purchased what they thought curious, and easily carried." But I found, on further inquiry, that an additional reason existed, in the fact that the price charged was beyond that at which such articles could be procured in town. This of course shuts out the great body of the population from ever entering the institution *as customers*. They may come as visitors, and *then*, as they wish to see the inmates at work, a purchase is made as a preliminary to their request being granted. Experience has proved that common, useful, and therefore always saleable basket work would find a ready market. I have seen no less than nineteen persons employed in an asylum on this kind of work, while very little of the curious or fanciful was to be had at all—the loss being so much greater upon it.

A fact which came lately to my knowledge will illustrate the practical evil of charging articles at a higher price than usual:—A lady much interested in the prosperity of one of our most celebrated schools, knew that there was a large accumulation of flour sacking on hand. Desirous to promote a reduction of the stock, she ordered a quantity of it—(into Yorkshire, I believe). She did all she could to effect a sale, at the price at which she purchased them, but in vain. She pleaded the quality of the article (for it is a well-known fact, that articles manufactured by the blind are very stoutly made), and backed this with what she deemed an unanswerable argument, viz.: that it was for the good of a charitable institution. But this was of no avail. She could dispose of none of them. I had this from herself. Now, if the institution had such difficulty in meeting a market, aided as it was by the local influence of its fair patroness: what was the shadow of hope held out to an obscure pupil, whose time had been consumed in making the article, that *he* would succeed in gaining a living by following the same occupation when he left the school?

Another instance of the same kind is as follows: A young man was sent to the school above alluded to—remained some years, acquiring a knowledge of rope and twine spinning, and returned home “to do for himself.” But his patroness told me, that it was more difficult to provide for him on his return than before—for he could not follow the occupation he had acquired without a little capital, *and the constant assistance of a seeing person*—finding this to be the case, he got quite unhappy. In short, his wants were increased, while his means were stationary, and he soon found that what he could perform very well at school, he could do very little in at home, still less find a ready market.

There is no description of work indeed which has been usually put into the hands of the blind, but is now made by machinery at such prices as to render anything like competition on their part utterly hopeless—hopeless even to those who have their sight, if they persist in what formerly might have been every way available. Much was open to the class I speak of in 1790 and 1795, which has long ago been taken out of their hands, by improved machinery. And, since the peace, the beautiful baskets imported from the Continent, not only command a market from the excellence of their workmanship, but also from the extremely low prices at which they can be had—even after the heavy import duty, and still more expensive charges of freight and carriage are paid! No basket maker will now engage in what is called “French work,” because of these insurmountable difficulties. Why then teach the blind, *as a means of obtaining* THEIR *livelihood*, that which the regular tradesman has long ago given up?

I am anxious it may be kept in view, that while I thus reason, and adduce the instances above mentioned, it is the *system* of schools which is opposed, not the *management* of them. The same results would arise in whatever hands they might be placed. I think no one can look at the reports of our various institutions of *that* kind, and those of the *other*, without at once seeing the truth of this. The former have to surmount all the difficulties, and sustain all the losses consequent on employing a succession of *learners*; the latter, though always burdened with many who cause a great loss, have on the other hand many who work nearly for their wages.

I do not know a better light to place this in, than to show at one view the numbers, and amount of sales of the London, Liverpool, and Bristol schools, and the asylums

at Edinburgh and Glasgow. From the reports of these institutions for the years stated, they stand thus—

	Report for	No. of Pupils.	Sales.
London	1832	112	£1,345
Liverpool	1836	108	1,820
Bristol	1835	40	1,000
* Edinburgh	Average of ten years, 1822-32	} — 80	3,200
Glasgow			
	1836	60	2,500

Wherever the public are excluded—unless a purchase is made, or an order given—we cannot look for sales equal in amount to those institutions where a different rule obtains. The reason assigned for such a rule is, that from the numerous parties visiting the school—the time of the pupils is much broken in upon. The experience of the institution at Edinburgh, and I believe, I may add, that of Glasgow too, is quite opposed to this view of the matter. The directors of the former (for of it I can speak positively) found it of the greatest consequence to the prosperity of the institution, that there should be no restriction. Any one, of whatever station in life, was made welcome to go over the premises during the hours of work, without any stipulation—as to purchase or order. The directors found this to be the best advertisement they could have. And, as to taking up the time of the inmates,—they invariably found, that the idea of strangers being at all times admissible, was an incentive to application. They were never busier than when visitors were on the premises. All were at their posts. If idleness ever went on, it was just at those times when visitors were not expected. Thus the “good will” of the *community* was cultivated, and not the comparatively casual “custom”

* I take the average of these ten years, because I have them before me. At present the numbers are rather less, but the sales continue much the same.

of those who came merely to gratify curiosity, and charitably burdened themselves with "something, however small,—made by the blind." This could be gratified only to a limited extent, the articles made there being more for *use* than *show*.

The expenditure necessary to carry on the London and Liverpool schools, as stated before,* is fully triple that of the institution at Edinburgh, while by the reports of the Glasgow asylum, it would appear that there they go still closer than their eastern neighbour, carrying on the work so as to pay itself. May I be allowed to say, that the rule followed out there, combined with the extreme economy in every department, appears more reconcileable with the strictest *pecuniary* considerations, than with the *philanthropic* view of the matter? The rule alluded to, as laid down in "Statements relative to the Glasgow asylum," 1835, is—"they (the blind) are allowed the same rate [of wages] that other workmen are allowed for the same kinds of work. It being ascertained that a man can make seven or eight shillings per week, he receives that as his weekly wages. At the end of every four weeks a statement of his earnings is made up from the work-book, and whatever he has earned over that sum is paid him; and as a reward to industry, *he receives one shilling per week of premium*; but if the weekly amount of work be not kept up, or the work be badly done, there is no premium allowed." †

This rule will no doubt go a great way to secure industry and good work. But are these confessedly desirable ends not obtained at rather a high rate in the eye of philanthropy, seeing the rule seems to visit upon the blind their privation, as if it were their fault? It seems to

* p. 6.

† p. 25.

say,—“You labour under the loss of sight, but you shall be allowed like wages as those paid to workmen who have their sight, with a shilling premium on every seven or eight wrought for,—finding out of that, as they do, house rent, coal, food, clothing, &c.” Is it not a well-known fact that weaving, and such like trades, are now paid at such a rate as to afford the scantiest supply to the most industrious engaged in them, even when working unusually long hours? And can it be supposed, that *the blind* can earn such wages, when paid at the *same rate*, as enables them to be even on a footing with their more favoured neighbours? That *some* do so, there can be no doubt, but to reason from extreme cases, *or such as are not applicable to the mass*, leads us sadly astray. A constant reiteration of the *pecuniary* aspect of affairs, does not appear to be all we have to look for from an institution formed for the amelioration, and relief, of one of the heaviest calamities to which human nature is subject. Might not this great and valuable end be better secured, although at the sacrifice of a few hundreds per annum?

Still, a glance at the above tabular view will at once show that there is something else than mere locality, which causes such very different results between the schools and the asylums: and when it is considered that the Glasgow one is only in the tenth year of its age, the amount of sales, the number of returns, as well as the education they receive, reflect high credit on those in the direction of its affairs.

It has many times surprised me to hear it said—“This or that person at such and such a school can make so many of these little baskets in a week—they sell for so much a-piece—and the demand is constant.” From this an argument is drawn that the same, or nearly the same, could be done by him or her out of the house. But it

ought to be remembered that the public have the *institution* in their eye—not the solitary inmate who makes the article. The former has a power of attraction, which the latter never can hope for. It has a status and an eclat which its members in vain attempt to carry with them. They sink into their own individual place, deprived of all the simple but excellent machinery which enabled them to do so much as they did: and those who would most cheerfully aid in every way *an institution*, cannot be brought in all cases to listen to the unknown and almost unbefriended blind. The question is not simply how much work a person *can make*—a far more important one is, *how much can he sell?* The aggregate of privation to be relieved is presented at one view in an establishment, whereas a unit of that aggregate, isolated from the attracting mass—in some fifth-rate street, some dark lane or alley, can only drag out a precarious subsistence, indebted in too many cases to parish aid. This is no fanciful representation. It is too true, as very many existing examples can bear witness.

But leaving generalities—always to be avoided—a closer view may be taken. And when reference is made to the report of the school at Liverpool, let it be kept in view that it is altogether the *principles* of that description of institution which are the subject of examination—not the management. I have no feeling but that of respect towards those who have so long and perseveringly laboured in that field of genuine philanthropy—certainly none but a wish, in all sincerity, to do good.

Taking, then, the report for 1836, we find that

the sales of work of the hundred and eight	
pupils amounted to	£1,820
And of accounts due for goods sold.....	50

£1,870

Dividing this sum by the number of inmates, we have a trifle above SEVENTEEN pounds as the result of the labour of each, and that at a price fully above the market, with the very great advantages arising from *abundant capital, a dense population, adaptations, arrangements, superintendence, and concentration of public attention* ON THE INSTITUTION. From this sum the pupil, supposing him to have left the school and able to sell as much, has to find materials, rent, and expense of manufacture. What, then, is the pittance left? Or, what can a solitary pupil do, dissevered from the above-mentioned aids?—as essential to him as, in the great majority of cases, they are beyond his reach. It is a serious mistake to speak of charitable feeling doing everything, or almost anything, in such a case. If a school sells five shillings' worth, an asylum selling at shop prices will sell the double of that,—and if I mistake not, enough has been shown to prove this: while the loss upon the latter will not be nearly so great as that on the former, the workmen being so much better qualified to produce an article in shorter time, and of better quality.

There are also some valuable branches of manufacture which can be carried on in an asylum, which cannot make any part of the tuition of a school. This is a matter of great consequence, and has been little adverted to. The remark applies to the female as well as the male blind. Sewing, for instance, is useless to a young woman, as a means of obtaining her livelihood, after leaving school; but it can be turned to good account as a branch of employment in an asylum. I allude particularly to the manufacture of hair, wool, lea grass, and cotton mattresses, and straw palliasses. This branch forms no item in the details of any institution, except that at Edinburgh—and to a small extent that at Glasgow. It furnishes employment to fully one half of the entire number at the

former, while the amount of sales under this head does not fall much short of £1600 a year. The sewing and binding of the covers of these, the repairing of others, as well as all the domestic sewing required, furnished constant employment for twelve or sixteen girls. This they did with great neatness and expedition. During the busy season for this description of work, the institution had more the appearance of a large upholstery concern than anything else. But no part of this work would have found its way into the hands of the blind, had they been unconnected with the asylum. However well they might sew in the house, the exercise of their abilities would never have been required out of it.

Again, at Glasgow, sacking and twine spinning form the staple articles of manufacture, the sales of the first *alone* amounting last year to £1136, and of the second to £408. It is by comparing facts of this kind, that we are to arrive at what should form the engagements of the inmates of an asylum for the blind. The articles just alluded to—mattresses, sacking, and twine, and I may add, basket work, and rope mats,—are as well finished as any in the market, are always in demand, and repay their cost better than almost any other description of work.

In addition to the weaving of striped Holland, ticking, and canvas for the covers of mattresses, there are also at the Edinburgh institution a few looms employed on sheetings, diapers, and towellings. The excellence of the loom and horse-hair manufacture is acknowledged by everyone. The yarns used are of the very best description, as anything of the kind, of an inferior quality, could not be made use of by the blind, from the frequency of breaking, knotting, &c. The weaving department is carried on under the care of only two overseers, who have the charge

of warping the webs and seeing them properly put in ; while the blind assist in "dressing" them, and carry on the remainder themselves. The blind not only help each other, but in many cases become excellent teachers of the younger members. This, however, cannot be carried into effect in a *school*, as the time of the pupil in that description of institution is expected, and ought, to be devoted to his own advancement ; while, in the other case, he is entirely at the disposal of the directors.

The branches of business just mentioned, particularly the mattress making, would be quite unsuitable to teach a pupil at a school. However well a young man might be able to go on while there, his acquirement would become nearly useless to him on leaving. He is unable, from the want of capital, to take a single step in such an extensive matter. Difficulty would surround him on every side. Indeed, turn his attention to what you will, the same, or nearly the same may be said. Many are apt to think, that people will not grudge to pay him a little more for anything he can furnish, on account of his privation ; and that work would be put up with from him, although not quite so neatly finished as it might have been by others. It is not consistent with fact—that such arguments would go far in practice. Charity will not do much for him. It may induce a few purchases, while the feeling is novel, but it soon finds the level of all such excitements.

Another reason of the economy of the asylum over the school system is, as before hinted at, that the latter has all its work in the hands of apprentices, and this ensures the necessary but expensive oversight of masters for the different branches. The pupil just leaves at the time he is beginning to be useful, and when by his proficiency he is doing a great deal towards his own maintenance. As

an illustration of the opposite system, I would mention the case of a man who has been ten or twelve years employed at Edinburgh. He lost his sight after being married—supports his wife and three children on 8s. 6d. a week; having also a suit of clothes once a year. He is an excellent diaper weaver, and returns by his work 6s. to 6s. 6d. per week. Thus, he and his family cost the funds only 2s. 6d. or 2s. a week,—whilst, at the same time, he receives the most valuable aids in everything religious, moral, and instructive; without a single restraint being laid upon him, more than there is on any man working in a large manufactory.*

I come now to speak of a class which has been little, if at all, thought of by the promoters of our schools for the blind,—a class which, *of all others*, one would have thought should have been provided for in the first instance. I allude to those *who have been visited with loss of sight after being married, and having families*. I know of no cases which call for relief with claims equal to these. Rendered sightless by the providence of God, at a period of life when

* Speaking of what they have as wages and clothing, reminds me of an arrangement with regard to coals and potatoes, admirably fitted to secure to the inmates the *best article at the lowest price*. Mr. Johnston, secretary of the institution, observing that they were exposed, as all such in similar circumstances are, to the wasteful practice of buying both these articles of daily consumption in small quantities,—living, in fact, “from hand to mouth,”—adopted the plan of every man “underwriting” himself, in the month of August or September, for so many tons of coals and so many bushels of potatoes, according to his anticipated winter wants. The list was regularly taken round the premises by the overseer, signed by him, and sent in to the secretary. To this was added the probable consumption of coals for the institution, and the whole was contracted for, to be delivered at the respective houses of the parties. These were *not a gratuity*. Immediately on the season commencing (October), every man on receiving his wages from the hands of the manager, paid 6d. or 1s. (according to the quantity he had ordered) into the hands of the “collector,” a steady man, blind too, who thus, “sitting at the receipt of custom,” received

all his habits and ideas have been fully formed, *what can a school do for such a one?* Its routine and confinement, especially if reading at spare hours has not been introduced, dissociating him from all to which he has been accustomed, would go far to paralyse everything like exertion on his part; but enable him to alternate his hours of work with the kind attentions of his family; give him the indescribable pleasure of thinking that he is still earning their bread; and you place him in circumstances than which no plan could go so far towards ameliorating his distressing privation.

It affords me much pleasure to observe, that the committee of the school at London have of late acted in a limited degree on this plan. By the noble bequest of £10,000, left by the late James Tillard, Esq., they have been induced to retain a certain number of good workmen *permanently*, their support to be wholly chargeable on this fund. In the report for 1833, it is stated, "A few of those instructed in the school have been kept upon a

from each the appointed payment, assisted by another, also blind, whose duty it was to see that none passed without depositing their weekly quota in the hands of the cashier. Thus sixty or seventy payments were made every Monday evening (for *that* was our pay day)—the cash was regularly balanced *by themselves*—and remained in the hands of the collector until it amounted to ten pounds, when it was paid over to the credit of that particular account.

Thus, also, they had among themselves a funeral society—the weekly collection for it was made precisely in the same way. They conducted their own meetings, having a committee of their number to manage its affairs, "the clerk," who recorded their "resolutions," being the only seeing person concerned, but concerned only as the recorder of their operations.

Circumstances such as I have just stated may appear trifling to some; but I mention them, because the design of these pages is to show how much the blind may be enabled to do for themselves when employed *in a body*.

permanent establishment, on a supposition that their earnings are sufficient to maintain them, and that their skill is necessary to enable the institution to keep up the credit of its manufacture." How they have found this to succeed, I have not learned. They will, I have no doubt, very soon find the advantage of such a plan.

It is due to the London school to notice an excellent feature in their plan—that of permitting the work of those who have been taught there, to be sent to the institution for sale. But, considering that it is the Metropolis, the amount of such sales is of very limited extent, being, by Report 1832, only £237.

But, on the prospect of institutions of the asylum description increasing, may not the following be suggested—that a portion of the ground be laid out at some little distance from the main building, for the erection of 20, 30, or 40 cottages, each suitable for a family? These might form three sides of a square, while the manufacturing portion of the establishment would, at a little distance in advance, form the fourth. For these a small rent should be paid, such at least as would pay the interest on the cost of the erection. This would remove the married men from under the irksomeness of those rules indispensably necessary, where numbers are congregated together. The young *may* be bent, and most needful it is that they should be so (quite as arduous a task with the blind as with the seeing), but grumbling and discontent are sure to follow where the same measures are applied to those grown up. We may build palaces, and provide an ample table, but what is that to the class I speak of, accompanied as it *must* be by rules of uniformity, galling to people who have had a house of their own over their head all their lives? By the other plan, they enjoy the feeling of independence. Their pittance, their endeared articles of

furniture (and where is the married, the widow or the widower who has not such ?), and should they have a child who ministers to the comfort of their declining years, would anyone interdict this solace residing with them ?

A bit of garden ground, however small, would be a great acquisition. "What !" some perhaps will be disposed to say, "a garden for the blind ?" Yes, for the blind. They enjoy everything we enjoy, and if any one witnessed the care in watering a few plants,—their anxiety in watching the progress of vegetation,—and their delight in the development of a fine flower, they might be inclined to change their opinion. But, it is only as a solace I speak of it—a place of retirement in which, after a day's work, they would heartily delight. The entire of these cottages might be under the general superintendence of the institution, as to exterior regulations, regarding cleanliness, &c. A premium to the best kept would prove an incentive to laudable efforts. The possessors of them would be entirely under the rules of the manufactory, as to hours for work and meals; while a chapel on the premises, and the pastoral care of a chaplain, would at once constitute a community of no small interest to every benevolent mind.

Whether such a plan may be realised or not, the class of blind I have now been considering deserves the especial notice of those in the management of such institutions. They have a large, very large claim upon our sympathies, and their situation has been almost overlooked. They constitute not less than one-fourth (if not a third) of the blind.

From the adult, however, I turn to the young. Pupils, ere they are admissible to schools, must have reached their eleventh or twelfth year at least. It has often been asked me, why not take them in younger ? This can

only be answered by saying, that the design of the institution, as well as of the parents, and others sending children, is to have them qualified as soon as possible *to gain their own livelihood*. To accomplish this, they must be received at such an age as promises to secure application and progress; and if *that were all*, the choice would be well. But it has often occurred to me that, where funds would admit of it, a most interesting department of an *asylum* would be a nursery for children under such circumstances, taking them in so early as four or five years of age. It is melancholy to think how many become incapable of instruction, and how many more never reach mediocrity, from the total want of the early care befitting their situation; or of any arrangements by which to call forth their powers. These lie dormant in the great majority of cases, while in the meantime, not only awkward habits of body, having no necessary connection with blindness, are acquired and strengthened beyond remedy, but the mind is also left to vegetate in ignorance—"no man taking care for it"—not from want of will, but from not knowing what should be done in such cases; meanwhile the "natural heart" remains in full operation, and is getting rooted in evil. In youth, they are too often the objects of ridicule and trick on the part of thoughtless companions, and thus, that feeling of inferiority is engendered in their minds, which is so apt to beget the worst feelings. Some become very listless, from sheer inaction. I have in my view many instances of all these. Had such been placed in early life under proper management, carried gradually forward from one thing to another, in education and work, many would have been rescued not only from bad habits, but fitted much more thoroughly for filling a respectable place in their own world. When children in these circumstances have reached the age of twelve,

fourteen, or sixteen, it is no easy matter to bring them into habits of thought, and action, so dissimilar to all they have been accustomed to. *If introduced, however, in childhood to companions in similar circumstances, and engaged in pursuits adapted to their privation, a rich harvest of benefit would undoubtedly ensue. Their hands would get gradually initiated into what they were afterwards to use daily, and a vast advantage would be gained as it respects moral training.* One girl at present under my charge laments, sometimes even to tears, that she was not sent to any kind of school at an early period, so that her memory might have been brought into exercise. That faculty, and her reasoning powers, are of the very weakest description; while, as to all kinds of domestic engagements,—making beds, dusting, washing-up, brushing shoes, &c., there is not a more active girl in the house. Wherever a blind child is, let it be sent to school—any kind of school—at the usual age. It is sure to learn—and learn much too. Parents are too apt to sit down with their hands folded, and say, “We can do nothing.” This is a great mistake, and in many cases has led to grievous results. I believe the reader will, ere this, have discovered that all I aim at is an infant school for the blind—combined with something introductory to their future handicraft engagements.

It appears to me an error, in establishments for the blind, to say a boy or girl shall not be admitted until they have reached a specific age. In place of this, if they show good capacity, it would be well to lay aside the rule in their case. Many are quick, observant, and inquisitive to a remarkable degree, and show a decided taste for music or other pursuits at a very early period. Of this Saunderson was an eminent instance. Such are certainly ready to take their place in an institution. While, on the

other hand, all above a certain age are excluded without any experiment being made as to their capabilities. An examination, and a few weeks' trial, ought to be made of any candidate, and let the result decide. By this means the benefits of the charity would be greatly extended. I have instances before me which will be mentioned afterwards in support of this opinion.

I would shortly advert to a rather prominent feature in institutions for the blind, viz.: the desire to carry forward the pupil at any sacrifice, to accomplish such pieces of work as may call forth the mere surprise of the passing visitor. If this is bad in an asylum—where it is very little practised—it is far worse in a school. The time of a *pupil* ought to be considered most sacred, and as much as possible appropriated to the acquirement of *that which he will be able to perform and FIND A READY SALE FOR on his leaving the institution.* Experiments on the capabilities of the blind ought to be left to those institutions where the time of the inmates is entirely at the disposal of the directors, and where failures would not fall upon the pupils after they are done with their course of tuition. To excite surprise is an easy matter, and one, I regret to say, too much cultivated. Everything which is attempted merely for the purpose of display, losing sight of the real benefit which the blind ought to reap by being put in the way of performing work *for which there is a demand, irrespective of mere curiosity*, is little else than waste of time and means. This applies as much to education as to work; and now that some attention seems about to be awakened in our schools to the culture of the mind of the blind, let us carefully guard against having the glittering filigree and partly-exploded scheming of the Continental schools foisted upon us.

I have already noticed that it was at Edinburgh the

first attempt was made in this country to introduce a *useful* system of education. That institution stood alone in this respect until 1828, when the asylum at Glasgow opened, following the former in all its details, and employing, for some years as its schoolroom teacher, a young man named William Lang, who had been taught at the first-named asylum under Mr. Beath, formerly mentioned; and of whose improvement on the Arithmetic Board I shall have occasion to speak afterwards. It is to be hoped that something will soon be done in the same way by the schools in England, whereby to bring out those powers which are so active in the blind.

The means adopted at Edinburgh were the teaching the younger portion particularly spelling, grammar, arithmetic, geography, and a general view of the solar system, by means of a very large globe and beautiful orrery. Joined to this, the directors, at the suggestion of Mr. Johnston, engrafted on the whole a system of *regular* and *extensive reading*—a means of instruction which, to a community placed in such circumstances, cannot be too highly appreciated. I advert to this feature more particularly, as it was altogether unseen by strangers—its effects, and the delight it imparted, could only be known by those in constant contact with the inmates. The reading took place after work hours, was furnished by the institution purchasing a share in a subscription library of about 12,000 volumes, and placing the choice of the books to be read entirely in the hands of those who were to hear them. The asylum paid the reader (one of the overseers), furnished the schoolroom with fire and gas, and added a newspaper twice a week. The attendance was entirely optional. Many of the inmates were married and had domestic concerns which prevented them availing themselves of it; but, if they did not enjoy it directly,

they did so indirectly, by the interesting materials furnished for conversation and remark. Many otherwise heavy hours, which would have been given to idleness, were thus enlivened. A tone of information and remark was imparted which at once struck on the ear, as coming from a well-informed mind—a tone far above their situation in life. The reading provided by the institution produced a desire for more, and latterly a considerable number of the inmates united in procuring the services of another of the overseers, who with themselves devoted only twenty minutes to their breakfast and dinner, returning to the schoolroom or workshop, where a favourite volume was indulged in, until the bell again rang for work. These they procured with great ease from the various congregational or mechanics' libraries with which the inmates or overseers were connected. Chambers' Edinburgh Journal was a weekly treat, furnished by the kind consideration of the publishers gratis, and was given by the blind listeners to the sighted communicator of its pleasing or instructive contents, as a reward for his labour in reading it to them. This was perhaps the easier settled, as it belonged to the blind only collectively.

During the whole period of my incumbency there, I never saw any books brought in for reading, but such as were of standard character. I am not, to this moment, aware of any orders, or injunction being in existence against novels, romances, or plays. But, although there had, they could not have been more practically obeyed than they were. Robertson's Scotland, Charles the Fifth, and America, Hume and Smollett's England, Captain Basil Hall's Travels, History of the Knights of Malta, Laing's History of Scotland, and many other such like works, will give an idea of the good taste and judgment with which the selection was made—and made, it is to be

remembered, altogether by themselves. The book to be read next, was regularly *voted in* at a meeting convened for the purpose.

But the foundation for the enjoyment of such a course of improvement was laid in the educational course adopted. The general knowledge of geography they had acquired by means of a large globe about thirty inches diameter, adapted for their use, and various maps raised in the same way, gave an interest to everything they heard, which could not have existed otherwise. And those who, from their advanced period of life, could not be expected to "go to school," yet were highly benefited by the quality (if I may so call it) and flow of conversation induced on those around them. The religious instruction of the institution was also amply provided for, although, I am sorry to say, from the very slender funds at command, by no means so amply remunerated. The chaplain spent half an hour every morning and evening, immediately before and after work, in singing, reading a portion of the Bible, and prayer. On the afternoons of Saturday, a regular service took place; and Monday morning was devoted to a catechetical examination of the younger branches as to the duties of the preceding Sabbath, accompanied by the repetition of the Catechism, the Psalms, Hymns, &c., which they had committed to memory during the preceding week. On these services all the inmates were, by the rules of the house, required to attend; while on Sunday every one went to his own place of worship, the institution providing for the accommodation of the junior members in a neighbouring church.

As connected with the instruction of the inmates, I must not pass by an excellent old man, named John M'Laren, who had spent his years from boyhood in the institution. Some notices respecting this singular individual found a

place in the Saturday Magazine for October, 1836. A hard day's work never prevented him getting the youth of the institution into his "workshop," in rotation, to teach them to commit to memory portions of the Scriptures, Catechism, Psalms, and Hymns. This he did every night for an hour and a half from the ample stores of his early-loaded memory. He never tired, and very seldom, indeed, was he to be found from his post. He entered the asylum early in life, and his companions observing his great extent of memory, sent him to an evening school, that he might teach them what he himself had acquired. The directors afterwards marked their sense of his valuable services by an annual remuneration. John continues these services to this day, although years are now pressing upon him. Neither newspaper nor book will tempt him from his evening avocation: the "reading-room" is a place unknown to him. He gets hold of the youth whose "turn" it is to come under his care, and sitting down together, the monotonous murmur of the oft-repeated passage falls upon the ear as you pass his humble place of instruction. He had a very handsome silver snuff-box presented to him by the directors, bearing a suitable inscription, as a mark of their sense of his exemplary conduct and services.

I dwell with the greater pleasure on the subject of education as conducted at the institution referred to, as the whole of it, including the teacher's salary (himself blind), and the allowance to "the reader," did not cost the funds more than *thirty pounds a-year*! For this very trifle the great majority of that house, consisting, at one time, of one hundred and twenty individuals, were in mental cultivation raised far above their condition. May the hope not be indulged, that some one or other interested in our far wealthier establishments in the south, will set about doing something towards rescuing those listless hours which,

after work, are too often given to conversation and plotting, not the best calculated for the peace of an institution or the morals of the younger members? And this is the more to be desired, as all the schools have the inmates boarded on the premises, perhaps with very limited play-grounds. There lies a heavy amount of responsibility when so much good can be done at so little cost.

On the opening of the school for the blind at York, reading an hour in the evening to the pupils—all between the ages of eleven and sixteen—has been adopted with the greatest success. When they came in, the ignorance of the greater part was deplorable. An ignorance not arising from their blindness, but from no instruction of any kind having ever been imparted, seemingly from the idea that their privation precluded everything of the kind. Two of them, about fourteen years of age, could not count beyond thirty. When they came to “twenty-nine,” they said, “twenty ten”! Two girls could not put on their own clothes at the age of thirteen and fifteen. In a fortnight or three weeks, they were delighted beyond measure that they were not only able to do that, but also make beds, wash-up dishes, brush shoes, and dust rooms. As to the reading resorted to at first, it was of the most humble kind. The very simplest of Æsop’s store had to be selected,—many of even these were beyond their comprehension. Sleep was a frequent visitor ere the hour was done. But after a little perseverance, a *show* as it were of otherwise good understandings took place, and the delights of Robinson Crusoe, Prince Lee Boo, and for Sunday reading, the never-to-be-worn-out Pilgrim of the inimitable Bunyan, opened up a new world to them. Twice has that work been so read, and the pleasure of hearing one and another saying during the second perusal, “Well, how much better I understand that now than

when read before!" was by no means small. Hannah More's delightful narrative Tracts formed another great step in their mental progress. Berquin's Children's Friend, and several volumes of that excellently got up "library" of the Kildare Street Society, afforded delightful occupation for many happy evenings. The enjoyment was much increased by all being invited and encouraged to make any remarks, and ask the meaning of words or phrases they did not understand. Many times the little audience avowed that "the reading hour was far the shortest of the day,"—playfully "that the watch *must* be wrong," and many times cough down the warning of the clock at the half hour, when "good night" followed.

As a class, the blind are just like their seeing neighbours, and the great bulk of them must be provided for by the every-day kind of work, which can be procured for them. In view then of extending education to them, apart from mere manual labour, there is reason to fear that more may be attempted than is befitting their condition in life. I do not know a greater error than wasting a child's time on pursuits which there is not the least expectation he will ever find practically useful. One in a hundred may perhaps show superior talent. Let that be pursued, and a little additional expense would not be grudged in such a case—but evidently to graft a system suited for such rare cases on the routine of an institution, would be increasing the expense,—wasting time,—and pandering to that insatiable thirst for the marvellous which has been so well depicted by Blacklock in the extract already given.* In this, as in everything else, the "golden mean" ought to be well studied, avoiding on the one hand the total want of provision for the mind which unhappily exists in our

own institutions,—and on the other, that which is threatening to make an inroad upon us of late, the showy, nicknack, and unsubstantial style of those on the Continent. More nonsense, undue expectation, empty gasconade, and discreditable quackery, have resulted from this consideration being thrust aside than many pages could tell. Well might Wood say, when speaking of some who consulted their own popularity at the expense of those under their care, “That the craving appetite for popular applause is not always peculiarly delicate, or fastidious in the choice of its food, and rather than remain unsatiated, will too often be content to prey on garbage.” *

Many things may be, and have been got up, very suitable for the *wealthy* blind, conducive perhaps as much to their amusement as anything else; but the necessary apparatus for teaching arithmetic, geography, &c., are both simple and cheap,—while *reading* to them, whatever their age, or state of mental progress may be, is to be had to any extent for a mere trifle,—and *this* (combined with the exercise of that faculty which seems to have been bestowed upon them in double measure, viz.: memory) *will always form the great instrument of their instructions, in a moral and religious point of view.* In saying so, I am well aware of what has been, and is now doing in the way of printing for the blind, by means of letters in relief—whereby they may read by the finger. The first attempt of this kind was made at the institution at Paris. The works put into the hands of the pupils, viz.: prayer books, grammars, dictionaries, and selections—amounted, in 1832, to about forty volumes.† The character used was the

* Account of the Edinburgh Sessional School, p. 46.

† North American Review, July, 1833.

Italic, which, although not so well fitted for the purpose as some others, was still read, it is said, with ease by the children. The volumes were however large and clumsy. The first attempt of a like kind made in this country was by Mr. James Gall, of Edinburgh, who in 1830, I think, printed several introductory books, and in 1834, these were followed by the entire Gospel according to St. John, in one volume, quarto. Mr. Gall, with the laudable intention of facilitating the progress of the blind, adopted a modification of the Roman character, taking away the circles, and substituting angles, so as to make the letter easier felt. Whatever opinion may be formed of the practicability, or rather the amount of ultimate benefit the blind may derive from this mode of imparting instruction, it is due to Mr. Gall to say, that for perseverance, industry, indefatigable prosecution of his views in a field entirely new, and amidst many difficulties, much praise is due to him. But, on the other hand, I feel bound to say that his statements as to the results of his labours, contained in his "Literature for the Blind,"* and a smaller work published lately, are marked by an imaginativeness, a kind of rainbow colouring, unworthy the soberness which ought to distinguish matter-of-fact details. Representations such as I allude to, are sure to lead to disappointment. But these remarks apply just as much to the statements of others who have started in this pursuit, as to Mr. Gall; and may perhaps be

* Mr. Gall speaks of his *inventing* a "Literature for the Blind." There seems to be a mistake in such a definition of his labours, as the literature for the blind can be no other than the literature for the seeing *made available to the blind*. This is one of many of the "fog islands," to use a nautical phrase, to which writers on this subject have of late been leading the way. Mr. Gall is too much a man of business to confound type letter with literature, although there is an inseparable connection.

attributed to the enthusiasm almost inseparable from ardent minds when expatiating on a favourite subject.

We have a remarkable instance of this in the case of music printed in relief, which "had its day" at the Paris school about twenty years ago. It is one of those instances which strikingly shows how much groundless anticipation may be indulged in, and positive assertions made, respecting a favourite, although manifestly a visionary, scheme. To show this the better, I will place the glowing representation, evidently drawn from publications on the subject, on the one side, and the matter-of-fact result on the other :—

"It (the Paris Institution) teaches the blind to read music with their fingers, *as others do with their eyes*; and it does this with so much success, that although they cannot at once feel the notes, and perform them upon the instrument, yet they *are capable* of acquiring any lesson *with as much exactness and RAPIDITY as those who enjoy all the advantages of sight.*"—*Ency. Brit.*, Article *Blind*, 5th edition.

Dr. Guilliè, SUPERINTENDENT of the Paris school, in his "Essay on the Blind," London, 1817, says, "Music was formerly printed in relief; but we have ceased to make use of it, as it was very expensive, and of NO USE; *the scholar COULD NOT read with his fingers and perform at the same time.*"—P. 118.

The reason assigned by Guilliè for the failure of this experiment is one so very obvious, that it is surprising any attempt of the kind was made. Supported as the school at Paris is, by a munificent grant from Government, it was all well enough that anything which promised fair should be tried. But music read piecemeal, to be played in the same fashion, could not but come to the ground, wearing out as it must have been to the pupil, however delicate his touch might be. It is not upon *that* the question depends. If a pupil has any musical ear at all, he will carry off a piece of music in an incredibly short

space of time, as all acquainted with the subject well know, and of which I will give some examples afterwards. But the failure of the French seminary has not prevented the repetition of the experiment, as a "Selection of Psalm Tunes and Chants, in raised characters, for the use of the Blind," was lately (1836) published by subscription by the Rev. W. Taylor, of York. However, as the obstacles which prevented the earlier attempt proving successful still remain in undiminished force,—“the pupil not being able to read with his fingers and perform at the same time,”—it is to be feared the blind will still be indebted for their progress in this delightful science to the more obvious and incomparably better plan of teaching them by repetition, as Guilliè acknowledges they found themselves, after all, obliged to do. It may be presumed that any one making an attempt of the kind must have been unacquainted with the work of Guilliè, although it is one well known to, and to be found in the library of, most of those at all conversant in the education of the blind.

That music “generally forms a prominent part of the education of blind persons,” as we are told in the preface to the work alluded to, and “that every effort should be made to render their acquirement of it as easy as possible,” are positions which no one will deny. But that these desirable ends are to be attained, or advanced in the least degree,—nay, are they not positively retarded?—by any such means as “music printed in relief,”—however “legible to the touch,” are positions which will be admitted by none who have had the most elementary experience in the matter. In saying so, I do not for a moment pretend to dispute the “advantages of music” to the class alluded to, nor that “it adds to their natural cheerfulness, and makes many an hour glide pleasantly away ;”—neither

would I refuse to hear any one “dilate upon the gratification it affords them,” and yet it is not to be admitted for a moment that any, or all of these put together, would form “an apology” for *such* “an attempt to serve our fellow-creatures, who have so large a claim upon our sympathy,” distinguished as it is by all that ample experience has pronounced to be utterly “useless.”

No doubt “each [musical] character must be fully explained to the pupil, and its use, value, &c., well understood;” but this can be done incomparably better than by the plan above alluded to, by the notes being cast in lead a little larger than the usual size used in printing, and fixed on a board if for a school, as is done at Liverpool and Edinburgh,—or, if for a private pupil, by the notes, rests, sharps, flats, &c., being pricked out on a sheet of paste-board; a mode, by-the-bye, as simple as it is economical, and equally applicable to maps, plans, elevations, and mathematical diagrams. It is remarkable how simple the materials are whereby to convey to the blind much that has been considered exclusive to the seeing. The wall of separation crumbles away, little by little, and it often strikes the mind how small a portion of what was once esteemed insurmountable has been left standing. Were the blind to study music only by the futile instrumentality of this “cast-off” suit of the French school, they would run every risk of remaining in double darkness with regard to this delightful science. Every hour a poor pupil spends upon it is an hour lost in time, temper, and acquirement.

Dr. Guilliè well observes,—“It is not to be supposed that because music printed in relief has been thrown aside, that therefore the blind are not taught music by *principles*.” Thorough bass, for instance, is, I believe, as readily studied

by the blind as by the seeing. This is done by means of "Tansure's Musical Board,"* and "Cheese's Common Pin Musical Notation;" both fully described, and figures given of them, in the Encyclopædia Britannica, 5th edition, 1817, article "Blind." The board is nearly three feet long, about eight or nine inches wide, and has two staves with ledger lines, above, between, and below. These are raised upon the surface of the board about one-sixteenth of an inch; the top of the stave lines being flat, while that of the ledger lines is round. It is pierced all over with little holes, upon and between the holes, so as to receive the pins, which represent the notes. But the drawing of it above referred to will enable any joiner to make it. Some slight alterations have, I believe, been made on them; but those now in use are, substantially, the invention of those they are here ascribed to, and have been in use in one of our institutions for nearly twenty years. Mr. Cheese used the common pin,—twisting the tops of some—striking off the heads of others—and, in short, forming, by similar means, all the musical characters in use. "These," he continues, "are kept in a box in the same style as a printer keeps his types, each different compartment of which must be marked with the character it contains." This gentleman's ingenuity led him to metamorphose his humble aids into no less than *thirty-two different forms!* But thorough bass may be studied with not above one-third of that number,—the mahogany board forming the entire expense. He proposed (and I believe used) an oblong cushion, whereon to set up any little piece of music he wanted, stretching a bit of thread across to serve for the stave. Of the board being really serviceable there can be no doubt, for it has been long in use.

* Originally described in his "Musical Grammar."

Exaggeration, one would think, had really been called in of late to do its utmost on this and kindred topics. Printing for the blind, so as to be read with the finger, must take a large share of this : and, without at all saying that they cannot be taught to read slowly by such means, I do not hesitate to say, from the experience of four trials made during these five or six years past, that to the *working blind as a body*, it will rank with the "music printed in relief" for them—"useless."

It is not attempted to be said that the cases are parallel. The reason of failure in the latter was quite decisive of itself, viz. : that "the pupil could not read music and play at the same time,"—apart altogether from one which I am confident held as good, had not the other settled the matter—that the music *could not* be read with the finger in the usual, or near the usual sense of the words "reading music."

Allowing, however, that *some* of the young blind may attain to read about half as fast as a tolerable reading child at school—speaking of this as an average rate—yet, what is to become of all this acquirement when the pupil's fingers become gradually hardened by his employment in basket and mat making, weaving, rope and twine spinning? Does it not almost amount to a certainty that his finger sight will follow his eye sight, and thus his time is not only wasted, but a *second infliction* comes upon him, and dashes all the hopes with which he had been inspired !

No one can contemplate such a result without painful feelings. But it is one which appears to me never to have occupied the place which it demands in the question at present abroad on the subject. In any observations I make, I trust it will not be thought that I am impugning the motives of those who have stepped forward in this

matter,—but I cannot help thinking that a great deal too much value has been attached to the trifling progress yet made, and that a sweeping general conclusion has been arrived at from the narrowest possible data. As I am not the inventor of any arbitrary alphabet, nor even the proposer of any one founded on our own Roman, while at the same time I have seen something of the working of those already out, I may perhaps be considered as the more unbiassed in the opinion I hold. I shall shortly state what has come under my own observation.

Printing for the blind was first introduced at the school at Paris, about forty years ago. That institution has continued all along, I believe, to use the *Italic* character, and their doing so has been assigned as the reason of so little good being done. But from ample testimony it would appear that the pupils there read as well as any, and that the number of works in their library, as before stated, was, in 1832, about forty. Mr. Gall, of Edinburgh, was the first in this country who directed the attention of the public to the subject. In 1831 he published some elementary books in what may perhaps be called the angular Roman character—the common Roman with all the circles turned into angles. When these books came out, he requested that some of the boys belonging to the asylum at Edinburgh might be allowed to take lessons from him. This the directors immediately, and with pleasure, granted; and I think, three, if not four, of our sharpest youngsters were under his care twice or three times a week. No restriction as to time was laid upon him—he had them quite at his own disposal—and they continued with him for some months. But, even with Mr. Gall's own attention—and, I am sure, when I say so, every security is given that all that perseverance, kindness, and ardour in a favourite pursuit could do was

done in their case. Yet, the result was nothing more than their being able to make out letter by letter and a few short words, some of them scarcely that. As to anything like "*reading*," in the common acceptation of the word, it was out of the question, Mr. Gall himself being judge. I am sure that gentleman will bear me out in saying, that a fairer specimen of what the *working blind* are could not have been found. They were boys of excellent parts, varying from fourteen to twenty years of age, and had been shorter and longer in the institution, so that even a variety of *finger delicacy* might have been reasonably expected amongst them. They were tried under his own eye—without limitation as to time,—and I will leave it to Mr. Gall to say to what the result amounted.

In every point of view I consider this to have been worth some dozen of subsequent experiments. Not only because, as I have just stated, Mr. Gall was the sole and unrestricted superintendent of it, but because the youths *were in those very circumstances*—working indigent blind—in what four-fifths of their companions in privation are to be found: and if printing is to be of any use at all, it ought to be so to them, else we are pursuing a phantom.

When the Gospel according to St. John appeared in 1834, many benevolent individuals who had subscribed for it, offered their copies to the directors for the use of the schoolroom. This was gratefully accepted, and to leave nothing undone, they directed a second trial to be made under the care of Mr. Robert Mylne, the teacher at the asylum—himself blind. Six boys were daily engaged on it, for as many months, and yet with all the attention possible, the result was not one whit better than the first one. Both teacher and taught were tired out of

measure. They often averred they could get the gospel by heart in half the time, and I don't doubt it. Mylne himself was very desirous of benefiting by this mode of instruction, and took a copy of the work home with him, but although able, like the others, to do a little, yet it was nothing when compared with "reading."

Thus, then, there were only *five* or *six* ever engaged on this study at the institution alluded to, while the number of inmates amounted to 110, or thereby. Yet, in a report published by the Society of Arts at Edinburgh, it is stated at page 6,—“Mr. Gall has obtained ample testimonials from the directors of the Edinburgh, Glasgow, and London asylums, as to the efficiency of his alphabet, and *his success in teaching the blind TO READ* by means of it in these institutions.” Confining myself, of course, to the first-mentioned, I cannot but express my surprise that any such statement could have been made, when not more than *six* were at any time engaged in the pursuit, and the result being as I have stated it.

I consider the value of these experiments to be far beyond any which have been made with pupils who have never been engaged in *skin-hardening work*. Such a boy was brought to Edinburgh from the Belfast school in the summer of 1835. This boy read slowly but correctly. But this did not, and does not yet, shake the opinion I had formed. He had never touched a bit of work, nor had he done so up to the month of March last, when I heard of him, so that I cannot consider him as any proof of the real value of printing in relief to the working blind. If, after five or seven years' application to the usual avocations of an asylum, he retains his acquirement, he may then be adduced in favour of the system. Extreme cases, however, whether for or against, ought always to be avoided.

Another trial, such as I have just detailed, took place

at the London school. It was commenced by Mr. Gall himself, as detailed in his "Literature for the Blind," and carried on so far, but was soon after relinquished by the directors. As the reasons have not appeared before the public, I can only state the fact.

Mr. Gall's publications were also adopted at the asylum at Glasgow, and by the reports of the examinations, promised to realise all the hopes which had been formed of them, when, about six or eight months ago, they were relinquished for a character which was recommended some years ago by the late Dr. Fry of London to the Society of Arts at Edinburgh. This Mr. Alston, the treasurer of the institution, adopted, and in consequence of liberal subscriptions, he was enabled to set up a press in the establishment, and has printed several works in the character alluded to, viz.: the Roman capitals. These are beautifully executed, and Mr. Alston has succeeded in publishing them at a price far below what the most sanguine could have some time ago anticipated. It is to be feared that his Ruth and St. James are too small, or perhaps too close for the great bulk of the blind. The introductory book of fourteen pages, issued lately, appears superior in every respect—the character is both large and sharp.

The character, however, does not seem to me to have so much to do with the matter as has been represented. Those enjoying sight are too apt to think that what appears so nice to their eye, must therefore be the best for the blind. This by no means follows; and so far as *experiment* goes, Mr. Gall's triangular Roman is as good as Dr. Fry's capitals. The former has been ranked amongst the arbitrary characters. This I think a great mistake, if not an approach to injustice, as any one looking at it only a few seconds can read it with ease. Under the idea that so much depends on the character, we have no less than

five different characters out already,—a course which, if persevered in, must tend to hurt the very cause so many have at heart. There is Gall's, the Bostonian, the Philadelphian, Lucas', and Fry's. Would it not be advisable to make a fair trial by one of these, rather than incur such a heavy expense, in publishing so many, *four-fifths of which must ere long be thrown aside?* The last mentioned has all along appeared to me the best (with a few slight alterations), both as to the letter itself and the smaller space it takes up. But, either way, I may be allowed to express my fear that the whole will become useless by the hardening of the skin under work.

In this opinion I am joined by men who, although they have never appeared on the subject, have had far longer experience in matters relative to the blind than any yet before the public. With one solitary exception, the whole has originated, and been carried on by those not practically acquainted with the blind, as an *indigent and working body*. Much undue anticipation also has been raised by promulgating that reading has been accomplished in such and such *institutions*. By this mode of speech we are led to suppose that all, or nearly all the inmates, if not *reading*, are at least engaged in the pursuit of it. The very opposite is the true statement—it is a mere fraction who are so engaged. Six or eight were all whose attention were ever turned to it at Edinburgh, where there were *a hundred and ten*—and something of a like kind holds true in other cases. To speak of this as benefiting the blind in these institutions is using language extremely liable to mislead. But, admitting there were a greater number engaged in the study, much may be maintained and carried on *in an establishment* which would prove altogether useless out of it—and such appears to me the difficulties attending reading in this manner, that however

successful an inmate might be *while within the walls of the institution*, it would be no proof that a really practical use would be made of it on his leaving.

A great deal too much importance has been attached to what the blind have said, when specimens of printing have been put into their hands. In their present circumstances of entire ignorance as to what reading is, how can they be judges? Besides, dependent as they almost all are, more or less, on those who have interested themselves in their behalf, and influenced by that feeling which inexperienced persons must ever feel towards a superior or teacher, how can an unbiassed opinion be looked for from them? I have seen even "the horn book" welcomed for a day or two. They hear what is said of it—"this is to teach you to *read*," and, associating this promise with all that they understand by the term, as well as being quite pliant—naturally so—to what they well know to be the views of those who take their opinion, they go in with the current. The best proof of this is, that no alphabet is out, but it has had the approval of those blind, to whom the proposers of that particular form of letter had submitted it. This appears to me no criterion at all, and is a description of proof very little to be relied on.

I have one remarkable feature to notice in connexion with this, viz.: the *extreme dislike of the blind to reading by the finger*. This has been the case in all the experiments which have come under my own notice, and in one I have heard of. I know it is said that this is no criterion—that everything new presents difficulties, and must be disliked. But this is not the case with all the other studies of the blind. Arithmetic, geography, grammar, that generally tiresome employment, committing to memory by repetition, and all kinds of handicraft work, are pleasures, and anxiously sought for. Exclusion from any of these, in the great

majority of cases, might be converted into punishment ;—but nothing of the kind can be said of the other. An arithmetic board or a map has been frequently borrowed from me to fill up part of the play hour, or to communicate to a companion the accession of knowledge which the borrower has just acquired,—but as to *borrowing a book*, I never once heard of it.

The positive dislike of the blind to this study seems to me to arise from a cause which has not been accounted for, viz. : the strong contrast which they perceive to exist between, not only the *rapidity* with which they hear us read, but the endless *variety* which we can at all times command. This they can never hope for,—nor indeed is it pretended to by the promoters of printing in relief. The hackneyed phraseology of “reading with the fingers as others do with the eyes,”—“reading with as much ease as those who enjoy the blessings of sight,”—“reading with the book under the bed-clothes,”—nay, to outdo all other bombast, we are told, “they can read with a stout glove upon the hand, or with a piece of linen laid upon the book” !—will not stand the test of experiment as it regards the mass. Indeed, ideas of this kind, combined with a volume of such recently published, are so abundantly ridiculous, that they are only fit for the nursery, or that much-abused personage,—“the discerning public.” One wonders how such crudities can be put forth by sober-minded men. The blind, therefore, contrasting their own slowness, and circumscribed limits, with our speed and ample range, feel that they are not only immeasurably behind, *but will always be so* in this respect, and even those in a superior walk of life, who have anxiously applied themselves to the works already out, do so far more as an amusement than anything else. One blind gentleman, who is much interested in everything of the kind, told

me lately, that his St. John just served to bring known passages to his recollection.

I have had several communications on the subject from individuals practically acquainted with it. The first is from a gentleman who has anxiously promoted this method of instruction, and given much of his attention to it. In a letter, dated March 25th, 1836, he says, "The expense of books for the blind will prevent their coming into general practice, and nothing but a national exertion can do it. *After all, many of them will not take the trouble, and the young must be kept to it,* or they will not do it of themselves." I may mention that at the time this was written, Mr. Gall's books had been a considerable time in use, and extremely well reported of.

The same gentleman writes me again, August 5th, 1836 :—"I observe what you say about the education. I am decidedly for teaching the young, but my fear is that the old will not learn, and as the young grow up, and are put to a trade, I fear they will not then be able to read, as the ends of their fingers will get hardened with work, and thereby lose the acute sense of touch they possessed in early life. I think Dr. H., of B., has great merit in what he has done, *but it is worth nothing* IF, in due time, they are not taught to gain their livelihood by their own industry."

Again, October 11th, 1836. After speaking of the progress some pupils had made with Gall's books, he continues,—“The books will soon give way with the fingering, and it is to be feared that attempts to make them portable will hurt the general benefit. As to those who must be sent to trades, time must settle that; but my own opinion is, that a large type will be required.”

From another gentleman, equally interested in the matter, I have the following, relative to a school lately established in another part of the empire :—"The pupils

there read with the greatest fluency, and some are engaged as Scripture readers in the cottages of the poor. Thus the blind, in their perambulations, are welcomed into the cottages, not to increase revelry by the tones of the violin, but to cultivate devotional feeling by the word of God. In the school for the blind here (Edinburgh), not connected with the asylum, children of all ages are taught in an exceedingly short space of time, and they read at least equally well with children of the same standing at school who have their sight." I may mention that the school here spoken of (at Edinburgh), whatever the number might have been at the date of the letter, had very lately, as I am informed by a friend, only *a very few* little ones attending it, in the midst of a population of 200,000; and when Mr. Gall's system had been before the public of the Scottish metropolis for *five years* at least, the "Gospel according to St. John" was offered at half the original price, since reduced, as I see by advertisement, to six shillings.

From another correspondent, *well acquainted* with the school spoken of in the first paragraph of the above extract, I have the following; the dates nearly correspond:—"The school at ——— is not doing well. The number there a short time ago was fifteen blind. At present they are eight or nine. They were taught many things; such as reading, writing,* geography, astronomy, Euclid, &c.

* By means of stamps, whereby a blind person pricks through on a sheet of paper *each successive letter* as he goes on,—the character being the same as that used by Mr. Gall. I do not see how a process so slow, tiresome, and perplexing, as this must be, can, in fairness, be called "writing," as in all Mr. Gall's publications it is. We might nearly as well speak of printing being accomplished by each successive type being used and restored to its place in the "case," ere another could be brought into operation. *Facility* ought, in my opinion, never to be lost sight of—the blind being enabled either to read or write. Acquirements, as well as doings, should be called by their right names.

Looms were erecting a few days ago, but prior to this,* no work was attempted but sewing and knitting. The children there could read more rapidly than any I have yet met with—but, *they hated it!* I believe they uniformly do so. I was always aware the superior progress of these pupils in reading was chiefly to be attributed to their *idleness!*” My correspondent, by using the word idleness, means nothing more than that there was no handicraft work, such as is usually carried on in institutions for the blind.

On the other hand, in the Appendix No. 10, to a little work recently published by Mr. Gall, we have “an address written and signed with the writing stamps, presented to Mr. Gall, by the pupils of the school at Belfast, accompanied with a handsome copy of the Bible.” This document says:—“Permit us to convey to you our deep sense of the unspeakable benefits you have conferred upon us. We can now read and write. Our solitary hours, which were formerly employed in brooding over our deprivation, are now spent in drawing holy comforts from the Word of Life, so that to us who sat in darkness, light is sprung up. For these blessings, Sir, we are, under God, indebted to your exertions. We cannot express what we feel,—we cannot repay what we have received,” &c. A suitable reply follows.

From these confessedly very discordant testimonies, the reader will form his own opinion. The whole of my own experience, up to the day, corresponds exactly with what is stated in the extract respecting the school at ——— “They hated it.” However strong this language is, it is strictly true, so far as I have seen—and I speak not only from what was before narrated as having taken place at

* The school had been in operation about eighteen months.

Edinburgh, but from my later observation of eighteen pupils following it out for nearly as many months—with one solitary exception, they “hate it.” The dislike indeed arising from its tediousness—I would almost say its hopelessness—must be greatly increased where, as at Edinburgh and York, *reading to them* is amply provided for. Two hours a day are spent in the former, and one in the latter, in this happy method of combining amusement with instruction. But in proportion as that is pursued, the other will come into unhappy contrast.

The above paragraphs were written, when happening to take up a volume of the Christian Observer for 1835, I met with the review of Mr. Gall’s “Literature for the Blind.” It is there stated that at Paris this mode of instruction (printing books in relief) had also failed, and been given up. The reviewer says,—“The conductors of the school at Paris began to print with great zeal, but the objects of their benevolent solicitude reaped little benefit from their labours, and the scheme at length *died away, and was forgotten*. Similar attempts were made in this country, but they shared the same fate.” The reason assigned is, “the rounded forms and too intricate shapes of the letters (the common italic), which were not adapted for easy discrimination by the sense of feeling.” If this is the case, it adds one more to the amount of failures; and, as the French began it long ago, had plenty of money at their disposal, and have always been distinguished by a keen pursuit of the *curious*, it carries with it the more weight. But to any one who has really engaged in the practical part of the matter, this throwing the cause of the failure on the shoulders of the character will not do. It lies just where it has been already placed, in the sense of touch becoming obdurate by work, combined with its tediousness

—its circumscribed range—and its unsuitableness to the great majority of the blind, from the necessity they are under of doing something to maintain themselves.*

I cannot quit this subject without saying that the elementary works both of Mr. Gall and Mr. Alston are distinguished for their simplicity. The latter has adopted some of the excellent little works of Mr. Charles Baker, of the institution for the deaf and dumb at Doncaster. Although these were written with a special eye to his own charge, yet, the ignorance in which the blind are too often allowed to remain, makes them as suitable for the one class as the other. I may here add, that while I have taken a different view of the subject under consideration from the promoters of this mode of instruction, I trust it is with a feeling of unmingled respect for the motives which pointed to the amelioration of the condition of a class of our fellow-men who have, as yet, even with all our institutions for their relief, had little done for them as a body. I speak particularly of the indigent blind. Whatever may be thought of the general question, great praise is due to both, for the perseverance with which they have contended against every difficulty.

* Appended to the report of the Society of Arts at Edinburgh, there is a communication from York. The writer says (page 15)—“Would it not be advisable for blind persons, especially those who do much rough work with their hands, to wear constantly upon some one finger a leather preserver (such as the finger of a glove) to keep it always in a delicate state to read or examine anything which requires nicety of touch?” When will idle *ingenuity* cease to be identified with *utility*?—and at what an easy rate may such theorists gain notoriety! The thing is impracticable. A basket-maker working with a finger-stool has been tried, and, as might have been foreseen, has failed; not to mention half-a-dozen other such items of ingenious trifling, plausible enough, and gaining much commendation when exhibited in a drawing-room by means of pocket models, but altogether useless when brought into practice.

ARITHMETIC is a study peculiarly suitable for the blind, and now really enjoyed by them, from the extreme simplicity of the "slate"—for so we call it—by which they are enabled to accomplish it. And it is somewhat remarkable that they are indebted to those labouring under the same privation as themselves for this beautiful appendage to the schoolroom. It was commenced by Saunderson a hundred and twenty years ago—improved by Moyes about 1790—farther improved by M'Beath at Edinburgh about twenty years ago—and received its last (one would think the last of which it is susceptible, so far as arithmetic is concerned) from the hand of a young man named William Lang, many years an inmate of the asylum at Edinburgh, where he received his education, but at the time he proposed the alteration alluded to (about ten years ago) of that at Glasgow.

The first idea of such an aid to arithmetic occurred to the celebrated individual first mentioned in the above enumeration, who, although blind from early infancy, rose by force of genius and laborious study to the professorship of mathematics at Cambridge. It is worthy of record that he was aided in gaining this appointment by the exertions of Sir Isaac Newton, who held him in great esteem.* He filled this office for a period of twenty-eight years, with the greatest credit to himself and benefit to his pupils. The board he constructed for himself was filled with square spaces, cut to a little depth. Into each of these squares he inserted *two* small pins, and the relative position of the one to the other—one of them with a larger head being

* I have much pleasure in possessing an excellent portrait of this extraordinary man. It is engraved by Vanderbanck, after a painting by —, 1719. He is habited in his official robes, and has in his hand a small armillary sphere, seemingly in the act of examining it.

placed always in the centre—denoted our ten figures. Thus, *each* figure required two pegs to represent it; and it does not appear that he thought of any simpler method. But it was a beginning.

The next improvement made upon the board was by Dr. Moyes, who, about 1790, and ignorant of what had been done by Saunderson, formed one to work with *three* pegs, screwing them into the holes in the same way as a violin peg. This was a great step, but he also remained satisfied with what he had done.

It would appear from statements made in the North American Review for July, 1833, that the Paris institution had not even availed themselves of Moyes' advance, but had gone back to the use of *ten* symbols—in short, just our own figures raised on the end of a type. These are arranged in boxes, and, when in use, are taken out of their "case," and inserted in the board. When the pupil has finished an account, his time is then wasted in "distributing" all his figures ere he can begin anew. Fifty or sixty movements of this kind must be a sad affair. "This method, however," says the reviewer, who had just returned from a survey of our European institutions, "has been much simplified* by a contrivance of one of the pupils of the Edinburgh asylum, where they use but *two* types instead of *ten*—a matter of no little importance to a blind person, even as compared with Moyes'. This is done by a point being raised on one *corner* of the little square peg, which, being capable of four positions, gives four figures. The other end of the peg has a similar point on the *side* of the square, denoting, by change of position, other four; thus, eight figures are represented by one peg, while the remaining two are on a second one. Still, two divisions,

* This was done twenty years ago.

to keep the pegs apart, has to be resorted to, and so far is a hindrance."

The last and I may say greatest improvement was made upon it in 1829 by Lang. This young man was received at an early period of life into the institution at Edinburgh, where he had an excellent education, both mental and mechanical, and with some others, his companions in blindness, went to the asylum at Glasgow on the opening of that establishment in 1828. He for several years continued to fill the office of teacher; and the successive notices of the results of his labours, as detailed in the reports of the annual examinations of his pupils, were highly flattering. Several suggested improvements in the board, but, as Mr. Alston, the treasurer of the institution, informed me lately, Lang's at once recommended itself from the extreme simplicity which distinguished it. This was nothing more than turning the *square* hole into a pentagon—or five-sided figure, and thereby at once reaching that most desirable point, viz.: having the whole TEN figures on ONE little peg!—five on the one end and five on the other; the point in the *corner* representing the odd numbers 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9, while the point on the *side* represents the even numbers 2, 4, 6, 8, 0. Two points on the side have been adopted at the Boston school,* and a

* On the opening of the school at York, a trial of six months was made of a plan whereby a piece of cork served the purpose of a slate, while another piece held an assortment of figures. These were formed by means of bending the head of the common pin into *five* different positions, and then striking off the heads of those meant to represent the *odd* numbers, while those with the heads *on* represented the *even* numbers. The figures were "sorted" on one of the pieces of cork, there being a row of ones, twos, threes, &c.—ten rows;—the other piece serving, as I have said, for a slate. When in use, the figure was sought for on the one piece, and stuck into the other, and when the operation was finished, they were all put back again into their own row,

line in place of a point on the side, by which a readier apprehension is given of what the figure is. This I find aids the beginner much, as by telling him to keep in mind that the *even* line (or ledge) on the one end show the *even* numbers,—while the end with two points being *uneven*, are the uneven numbers. Three children were adding five and six figures by this means, one in less than an hour—the two others in an hour and a half. This change has been adopted at the school at York, where Lang's board has called forth the admiration of every visitor.*

By this admirable idea the necessity of having *any* division of pegs, or figures, is done away with; and now the pupil taking up any one which comes in his way has the figure he wants, and by the average practice of children at school, he can calculate as readily with it as the seeing can with the pencil. This has been proved. And when done with a sum, in place of wasting time by "sorting off," *i.e.*, replacing each figure in its respective receptacle, all he has to do is to turn the board upside down, and they fall out. A sharp little fellow on doing so one day, said to me, "Why, Sir, I'll have my count rubbed out before you have yours!" I was accompanying his operations on a common slate. I may truly say of Lang's board, what

preparatory to a new one. But this, consisting, like the Paris plan, of TEN *different* symbols, presented such difficulties to most, and was so tedious to all—besides being very expensive, the corks soon becoming so perforated as to prevent the pins standing upright, and costing from 1s. 6d. to 2s. 6d. a-pair,—that I requested Mr. Alston for one of the boards used at Glasgow, which was immediately and kindly complied with. This I took the liberty of recommending to Mr. Taylor, as a substitute for the other; and its adoption has been accompanied with corresponding facility and pleasure to the pupil.

* North American Review, July 1833.

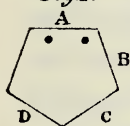
Arithmetic Board.

for the Use of the

BLIND.

as improved by William Lang,
formerly an inmate of the Asylum at Edinburgh
and now of that at Glasgow.

Fig. 1.



Improved Peg.

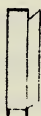
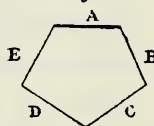


Fig. 2.



Glasgow Peg.

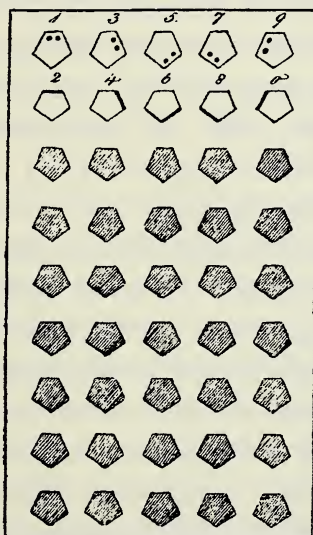


Fig. 3.



I have often said to visitors, that it has, to the blind, macadamized the road to arithmetic.

As this board might be extremely useful to many who are not near schools, and can be procured for a mere trifle, and last a life-time, I will shortly describe how it is used, and give the sizes and prices of those I have lately had made. The diagrams one and two show the form of the hole, but much enlarged. The sides, as marked, may be called A, B, C, D, and E. When the little peg is put in, having the end up with the two points on it, as at A, it represents *one*,—turned round, so as to stand at B, it is *three*,—at C, *five*,—at D, *seven*,—and at E, *nine*. Then turning up the other end with the slightly raised ledge upon it, and inserting it in the same order, we have the even numbers *two*, *four*, *six*, *eight*, and NOUGHT,—not *ten*, as I have often to impress on my young charge, for we have to use *two* figures for *ten*, as well as the seeing. To illustrate this, I have put down a sum in multiplication, which I have no doubt will be at once understood, and enable any one, giving it ten minutes' thought, to teach it—were it but as a matter of amusement to some blind neighbour. Figure 3 shows how the sum 245 would stand in the board: the multiplier 3 is under 5, and the answer is 735. Where the seeing use a line under a sum preparatory to casting up, this is accomplished by the blind leaving a row of the holes unoccupied. The same in division—the divisor and quotient is separated from the dividend by a hole being left between. Thus with these few pegs, *any* sum in hundreds may be expressed, just by turning round the peg, or upside down. The facility to the teacher is not one whit less than to the pupil.

The size, as well as the weight of the board as used at Glasgow, has been greatly reduced; those I got made lately not being larger or heavier than a common desk

slate, although necessarily a *little* thicker—while those who are curious in very small ones, may have them so as to go into a vest pocket, or a common card-case. I have one of this description only five inches long, and three wide, containing *ninety-six* holes in it. For real utility, however, the common size we use is far preferable. These weigh only fifteen ounces, measure ten by six and a half inches, and contain 204 holes, price 4s. They are made of wood, covered on the top with a white iron plate. I have had smaller ones made, quite large enough for beginners, six inches by four and a quarter, containing seventy-seven holes, weight, *five* ounces, price 2s. 6d.—These last I have more than once been requested to get made in mahogany as a drawing-room curiosity, and to add a short historical notice, which was pasted on the back.

In conclusion, on this part of my subject I may be allowed to express my surprise, that the humble individual whose name has now been connected with the improvement just described, has never had any mark of approbation bestowed upon him ; while both medals and money have been awarded to others for inventions in aid of the science alluded to—arithmetic—which every practical man knows will not stand a comparison with the pentagonal board. For myself, I am happy in being at full liberty to say all I think of it, having had nothing to do with it, either in the way of invention or suggestion. Knowing its value, I recommended its introduction into the school at York ; and gratefully acknowledge the relief it has afforded both to my pupils and myself.

In addition to arithmetic, GEOGRAPHY has proved one of the most delightful studies the attention of the blind can be directed to. It partakes more of a recreation than anything else ; and from the interest it imparts to every-

thing they hear read, it is pursued with the greatest avidity. It is not for the purpose of "showing-up" a young person labouring under such a privation, as being able to place his finger upon this, that, or the other place. Not at all. But as reading *to* them, whether in an institution or out of it, will always prove the best means of imparting instruction to them, a general knowledge of this science is almost indispensable. It makes everything alive to them—it is soon acquired—and once obtained, it needs little revision, if any. Their delight in resorting to a map to "see" whereabouts such a place is—teaching each other with all readiness, and now and then coming, as they have often done to me, and borrowing a map "to look at it," affords the strongest proof how heartily they engage in it. In the education of those in better circumstances, I would esteem an intimate knowledge of geography, by globe and map, to form one of the most important branches of their education, and certainly to hold a place prior to that of the exact sciences. What is the reading of even a newspaper to them without it?

In the close of 1835, circumstances led me to think on some plan whereby to avoid the tedious operation of glueing on small cord round the coasts and boundaries of a common map, so as to adapt it to the blind. This had been the practice previously followed. Besides the expense of time and labour, it did not furnish me with a *different feeling*, whereby to denote rivers,—a desideratum in such matters; and any which had yet been in use in this country afforded no idea of mountains or chains of mountains, without which a map is far from perfect. Glue and sand were tried without success, and also a composition of paint. But these gave way to one of the simplest, quickest, and cheapest methods I could wish for,—so much so, that in course of a few hours a common map may be prepared

for the use of the pupil. This plan was described in a paper inserted in the Penny Magazine for October, 1836, and I have now sufficient proof that the finger of the pupil, after twelve months' practice, makes no impression whatever on the raised line.

This was accomplished by pasting the map upon a sheet of thin pasteboard ; or, what I have found to answer quite as well, cartridge-paper, and pricking through, by means of a bluntish pricker, a succession of small punctures, which, on the right side of the map, appear raised, and guide the finger round the boundaries of counties, islands, &c. ; mountains were still easier denoted, by pressing the handle of the pricker into the back of the map, a quire of paper being placed under it to serve as a cushion ; and the rivers were raised in like manner by pressing hard into their course *the side* of the pricker, indenting thereby a continuous line. I had a composition put into my hand by a young man, a chemist in York, which, with care, answered remarkably well ; but, if the finger of the pupil is the least wet, or even damp, the composition rubs off. For those who would take care, this could be used successfully ; but for a school something less liable to being defaced is requisite.

Embossed maps for the blind have lately been printed, both at Boston, United States, and at Edinburgh : but from their extreme scantiness of information they convey scarcely any idea, particularly those published at Edinburgh ; which, from their smallness of size, render it exceedingly tantalising to the pupil. There is only the capital of each country marked in either, although the Boston one is four times the size of the other. They are both maps of Europe. The latter has had the sea done in parallel horizontal lines, as *feelable* as small wire, which presents a very rough surface, while the land is quite

smooth. Would *vice versa* not have been more appropriate? In a sheet map of the same quarter, prepared as described above,—there are not less than a hundred and ten places indicated, besides rivers and mountains; and the sea being rendered, as a little boy said, “just as smooth as glass,” by being highly varnished, while the land is done over with what I may perhaps call a blind varnish—quite dull and roughish,—the distinction between land and water is of the most marked description. The capitals are denoted by a roundish headed brass tack,—towns of greater or less note, by the heads of three different sizes of the common pin. For schools it is necessary that the map should be glued on thin board; but for any one in the better walks of life, they may be kept in a portfolio.

Having occasion for a map which would embrace the whole geography of Scripture—both Old and New Testaments,—and not being able to procure one to my mind, I constructed one of two sheets of pasteboard, by *embossing on the REVERSE SIDE* with the handle of a hammer, using the handle of a much smaller one for finishing off the niceties of the coasts. This, when finished, had all the appearance of having been laid down with a thin coat of plaster, and from the action of the instrument, the land had a roughness conveyed to it which realised every expectation.

I am the more particular in these details, as they may be useful to those near the blind. I believe many would be glad to devote both time and trouble to a relative so situated, if they knew how to be of use. There is far more within their reach, even with the most simple materials, than they have been accustomed to suppose.

In addition to a few maps, a large globe is indispensable for an institution. That at the asylum at Edinburgh, the first of the kind ever constructed in this country, is thirty

inches in diameter. The land and mountains are roughened and quite raised from the "level of the sea," while little pegs denote the principal cities. It has a semicircular meridian notched on the side at every ten degrees,—by this the latitude is easily found : while by a similar mark, every fifteen degrees is distinguished on the equator, and thereby the longitude reckoned. An excellent appendage to this is a board with the heights of mountains marked ; and another having the comparative lengths of rivers laid down upon it. I have found a few pieces of willow answer excellently for the last, choosing for the longest river the thickest willow, and flattening it at the embouchure somewhat in proportion to its real width.

I shall now shortly consider WRITING for the blind. When speaking of this acquirement, I could wish I was spared the necessity of saying that things should be called by their right names. With the exception of the facsimile contained in the report of the institution, 1833, at Boston, United States, of the writing of three blind girls, I have never seen anything that approached to what we usually call *writing*. In that term, *facility* ought, in my opinion, to be included as well as the mere fact of certain letters being formed. Thus stamping *letter* after *letter* by means of stamps, each having a letter of the alphabet upon it, has been gravely talked of as "writing." "Stamps," it is said, "with the letters set with pins, are used by the blind to press through the paper, and in this way they are able to write a long letter upon a sheet of paper,—write the address upon it—and forward it by post, with as much accuracy as if they had been addressed in the common way." Let anyone analyse this process—by thinking of a person destitute of sight, sitting with a box containing the twenty-six letters of the alphabet on stamps—ten figures and stamps—and as many more for

commas, periods, &c., in all about forty-six different stamps. They wish to *write* a letter, and commence with the words, "Dear father." The letter D is groped for, found, pressed through the paper, and returned to its place; e follows with the same accompaniments, and every successive letter brings with it the same routine of "toil and trouble"; and we are soberly told of this as constituting "writing"!

Nay, by another process, somewhat different, but not less wearisome than the above, the same fertile imagination assures us, "in sober seriousness," that it would not be difficult for the blind to write the Lord's Prayer "*upon a piece of paper, not larger than a square inch!*" and, "that there is no doubt the blind may yet exhibit specimens of penmanship which might be fairly entitled to comparison with the productions of accomplished writers!" Anything like comment upon such "entertainments," so much akin to our nursery reminiscences, would be out of the question. It would be well if they even stopped there; but a farther stretch of the same amiable enthusiast proposes a plan whereby the blind pupil is to read printed music *with his tongue*, while his hands are occupied with the keys!!

As I have in view, in these pages, the prospect of institutions for the blind doing something towards such an education *as is befitting the station of their pupils or inmates*, I shall here quote the experience of the Paris school, as recorded by Guillè in his essay formerly referred to. The doctor allows the "*practicability*" (p. 91) of this art being taught, but adds, as a winding-up of the whole, as follows:

"The writing of the blind is never very regular, because they cannot keep a line with a uniform base; the tails of the letters go beyond that line; nor can they appreciate the dimensions of our letters written with a pen, nor form

an exact proportion in the form of them. But still their writing is legible, *and sufficient for their wants*. They do not write very fast; but, as they are never in a hurry, slowness is to them a trifling inconvenience." (P. 100.)

If such is all that could be said of the results in an institution confessedly abounding in such like "curiosities," pursued, too, with a pertinacity worthy of a better cause; what are we to think of the time of young people being wasted in an acquirement so difficult to be attained, and, under their circumstances, so evidently of no practical benefit? I say so, even with the Boston report before me, for, until we are told in *what time* such and such lines were written—by what means—and to *what extent the handiwork of these children promised the realization of their being able to do for themselves*, AFTER leaving the school, I am confident that any favourable opinion must, in the minds of practical men, be suspended.

I allow much may be done in the way of amusing that class of the blind who are not dependent, by getting up numberless pursuits, which would be altogether unfit for the indigent blind. And I venture to think this is one of them. I have seen, within these few months, the genuine writing of one so taught, and I can truly say it has no claim to any such designation, and can only wonder how any one could suspend his credit as a teacher on such a result. Even those who have had their sight, and lost it in after life, can scarcely sign their name legibly after a few years, of which I have seen several instances. If stamps are to accomplish anything, the plan proposed by Mr. Craig, of Edinburgh, is far preferable to those spoken of above. He had only *seven* stamps, each of which, having a character upon it—suppose a V—was capable of four different positions, representing the four first letters of the alphabet, and so on of the rest. Still,

this *looks* more simple than it will be found to be in practice, as the stamper does not require the letters *just as they follow alphabetically*. If he requires a, g, o, he has to resort to three different stamps: he has to get them—use them—and replace them in succession: the combining of four letters on one stamp aiding him nothing at all, unless he could use them in the order in which they are combined.

In conclusion, on this part may I be allowed to make one or two general remarks? Institutions for the blind have chiefly in view those who, from their situation in life, must do something for themselves; and it is this class I have chiefly had in view in the remarks I have made. When I speak of educating them, it is not with any intention of withdrawing them from the main object of their being sent to an establishment of the kind. *That* must be the first care—the other may be superadded more in the way of recreation than anything else. To speak of introducing algebra, and mathematics, and printed music, and other such like pursuits into an institution avowedly established for the *indigent* blind, or even those in the middle ranks, appears to me setting up a toy-shop rather than anything else—ministering far more to what I do not hesitate to call a pitiable craving for the notoriety of a name, than to the real benefit (whether present or prospective) of those whose sole attention ought to be directed to the great purpose for which they were sent: with such a limited time devoted to education as may raise them from gross ignorance—imbue their minds with sacred truth—and furnish them with such means of mental enjoyment as may cause their leisure hours to pass swiftly by. To surprise visitors is one thing—to benefit the blind is another and a very different: and this portion of these pages cannot be better closed than by reiterating the words of Guilliè which appear on the title-page:—“Nothing is easier than to make

the blind perform extraordinary feats, by accustoming them to conquer difficulties apparently insurmountable; but what advantage would such useless employments" (and, let me add, *studies*) "be to them?"

I come now to what I promised at first, viz., to conclude these observations with a few notices respecting the habits, modes of thinking, and expression of the blind. They certainly are, as a body, the most habitually cheerful of mankind. How it comes to be so, I cannot tell, and I have no wish to theorise. I cannot designate the blind, as is almost universally done, "the unhappy," "melancholy," "pitiabie," and so on. I know nothing more erroneous, or more opposed to the feelings of by far the greater majority. They cannot endure such terms themselves, and strangers should be on their guard against using them in their presence. I know a fine young girl, who lost her sight a few years ago at school, who immediately leaves the room when such misplaced expressions are uttered. Strangers visiting an institution invariably see them to great disadvantage, as then the whole are instantly quiet,—the cheerful song or chorus breaks off in the middle,—the stream of gaiety and instruction running in conversation, whereby, indeed, as much is conveyed to the junior branches as they gain in the schoolroom, and is a most excellent preparative to their entering on its pursuits,—is instantly hushed, and they appear more like so many automatons than anything else. This, combined with the usual feelings with regard to their privation, naturally begets expressions, in their hearing, of commiseration, which never fail to give pain, and even sometimes to excite their ridicule on the mistaken party leaving the room. Some schools have, therefore, adopted the plan of having printed labels up throughout the premises, warning visitors against doing so.

I remember a lady walking round a school to view the different kinds of work in the hands of ten or twelve girls. She, by half articulated ejaculations, showed what was passing in her mind, but I believe none of us were prepared for the astounding climax which followed, when turning round to me she said, in the hearing of all—"Well!—*poor things!*—do they *ever speak?*" The effect was almost instantaneous, and I was glad to get her outside the room door, to allow vent to the burst of laughter which immediately followed her exit. "*Poor things!*—do they ever speak?" became quite a bye-word among them afterwards.

"The world to them is not less an enchanting scene than it is to us, provided they have occupation. Were they not continually reminded of their inferiority by our officious and unnecessary expressions of sympathy and compassion, they would not feel it. They look upon the want of sight as a loss of advantage, and not of enjoyment." *

Romping, jumping, laughing, and screaming, are as delightful to them as they can be with boys and girls who see. The cross-bow, bow and arrow, trundling each other in a wheelbarrow, spinning tops,—and to those who have a glimmer of light, marbles and a kind of cricket, such as secures at least both healthful exercise and pleasure—all afford ample amusement to the first mentioned, while there is no want of the usual boyish plotting and mischief. The girls also enjoy their play hours very much, and contrive to stand in as much need of the needle as their more favoured sisters of sight.

"Well, Jane," said I to a little girl of twelve years of age, whose frock seldom but showed signs of rough usage.

* North American Review, July, 1833.

“Well, Jane, this will never do, why you would require a new frock every week.” “Aye, aye, Sir, just what my mother used to say,—she would need to get a *leather dick* for me,” was the animated reply,—at the same time giving a bound away, as if not much inclined to turn a new leaf.

It is a remarkable fact that the blind scarcely ever hurt themselves, either on furniture or in play. At Edinburgh, they were constantly walking about the crowded streets. There were four or five “messengers” whose business it was to carry home all the goods sold—baskets, mattresses, rope mats; and not only did they do this with the greatest exactness, but they were daily in the habit of going to all parts of the city, Leith, Portobello, and environs; to take measurements for bedding. I have many times had the dimensions of two, and even three beds brought me,—all on memory,—with a precision not exceeded by the most expert workman, including the exact allowance of so many inches to be cut out for the bed-posts.

I had occasion one evening (when at Edinburgh) to send out one of these blind men with a mattress. I gave him the bill with it, that he might receive payment. He returned with the account and mattress too. “I’ve brought baith back, ye see, Sir,” said he. “How so?” “Indeed, Sir, I didna like t’ leave ’t yonder, else I’m sure we wad ne’er see the sillar—there’s no a stick of furnitur’ within the door!” “How do you come to know that?” “Oh, Sir, twa taps on the floor wi’ my stick soon tell’t me that!” Having to send the same man to Portobello,* towards evening, I warned him (rather inadvertently!) that if he did not make speed it would get dark. “My word, Sir,” said he, laughing, “I wish I

* Three miles from Edinburgh.

had a shillin' for ilka time I've been in Portobello i' the dark."

Illustrative of this, the following beautiful lines, which appeared in the Saturday Magazine for June, 1835, will, I hope, not be unacceptable. I have never met with anything of the poetic strain so genuinely descriptive of the feelings of those labouring under this privation—they are true to the very letter. The idea conveyed in the two lines in italics is, of itself, a gem:—

THE BLIND BOY.

FROM A SPECIMEN OF PRINTING IN RELIEF, FOR THE USE OF THE BLIND.

THE bird, that never tried his wing,
 Can blithely hop and sweetly sing,
 Though prison'd in a narrow cage,
 Till his bright feathers droop with age;
 So I, while never bless'd with sight,
 Shut out from heaven's surrounding light,
 Life's hours, and days, and years enjoy,
 Though blind, a merry-hearted boy.
 That captive bird may never float
 Through heaven, or pour his thrilling note
 'Mid shady groves, by pleasant streams
 That sparkle in the soft moon-beams;
 But he may gaily flutter round
 Within his prison's scanty bound,
 And give his soul to song, for he
 Ne'er longs to taste sweet liberty.
 Oh! may I not as happy dwell
 Within my unillumin'd cell?
 May I not leap, and sing, and play,
 And turn my constant night to day?
 I never saw the sky, the sea,
 The earth was never green to me;
 Then why, oh, why, should I repine
 For blessings that were never mine?

Think not that blindness makes me sad,
 My thoughts, like yours, are often glad.
 Parents I have, who love me well,
 Their different voices I can tell.
 Though far and absent, I can hear,
 In dreams, their music meet my ear.
 Is there a star so dear above
 As the low voice of one you love?
 I never saw my father's face,
 Yet on his forehead when I place
 My hand, and feel the wrinkles there,
 Left less by time than anxious care,
 I fear the world has sights of woe
 To knit the brows of manhood so.
 I sit upon my father's knee:
 He'd love me less if I could see.
 I never saw my mother smile:
 Her gentle tones my heart beguile.
 They fall like distant melody,
 They are so mild and sweet to me.
 She murmurs not—my mother dear!
 Though sometimes I have kissed the tear
 From her soft cheek, to tell the joy
 One smiling word would give her boy.
 Right merry was I every day!
 Fearless to run about and play
 With sisters, brothers, friends, and all,
 To answer to their sudden call,
 To join the ring, to speed the chase,
 To find each playmate's hiding-place,
 And pass my hand across his brow,
 To tell him I could do it now!
 Yet though delightful flew the hours,
 So pass'd in childhood's peaceful bowers,
 When all were gone to school but I,
 I used to sit at home and sigh;
 And though I never long'd to view
 The earth so green, the sky so blue,
 I thought I'd give the world to look
 Along the pages of a book.

Now since I've learned to read and write,
 My heart is fill'd with new delight;
And music, too,—can there be found
A sight so beautiful as sound?
 Tell me, kind friends, in one short word,
 Am I not like that captive bird?
 I live in song, and peace, and joy,
 Though blind, a merry-hearted boy.

PARK BENJAMIN, OF BOSTON, N. AMERICA.

I have many times observed how lightly, even jocularly, they have adverted to their own privation. It may indeed be questioned if the majority consider it any privation at all. Standing for a few minutes after prayers to have a little chat, became quite a practice with the girls at York; it was with difficulty, indeed, I could get them prevailed on to go to bed. One of them, a girl of strange mental peculiarities, slow to the last degree in acquiring everything—still, inactive, sleepy—yet at times showing by her playful, sometimes quaint observations, that there was an activity within, took up a book laying at my hand—turned her face up towards the gaslight above my head (which she only *knew* to be there by report), and playfully observed as she whirled over the leaves, “Dear me, Sir, what bad gas that is, I can’t see to read a word by it!” The same girl, standing near the fire, heard a companion trying to decipher some of the letters of the book in relief. “Let me see,” says the latter, “what’s this—b, i, t, t, e, r,—bit—what does that mean?” “Sit a little nearer the light, my dear,” said her fireside companion—“sit a little nearer the light, I know you don’t see very well, Jane.” The tone of this, indicating as it did—genuine playful mischief—struck me much.

“Now, now, Mr. A.,” said a little romp, as pretty a child of eleven years of age as one could wish to see, as

she laid hold of a letter on my table, and popped it up to her face, "now for all the secrets in this!" I told the same little one to tell a servant to bring me a candle. The latter (improperly) committed it to her care. On seeing her with it, I said it was wrong in her to take it. "O, Sir," said she, laughing—"haven't I seen my way with it?" "O, ho," said a spirited boy, as he heard me telling of something disagreeable I had seen in town—"I beat you there, Mr. A.—I never see anything that vexes me, you never heard me grumbling about that!"—laughing at the same time with all the hilarity imaginable.

A young man, at the Edinburgh asylum, born blind, was at all times the essence of cheerfulness. He was one of our most correct "messengers," and a good collector of accounts, of which from the amount of our annual sales we had many. He, as well as several others, could easily take from four to eight of these at one time. Coming along the passage whistling—he was always whistling—he began to grope about for his hat, which not finding on its usual peg, he cried to a companion, whose foot he heard not far off, "Willie, come here, man, and look for my hat, ye see better than me." The one was as blind as the other.

The ardent thirst of the blind to *see sights* is a feature no less extraordinary than it is true. The great bulk of them express every desire, and make every endeavour to gratify this (to us) unaccountable propensity. When his Majesty, just deceased, was proclaimed at Edinburgh, the united request of the inmates of the institution was, to give them liberty to *go and see the procession*. Having only recently entered the establishment, I was exceedingly puzzled; and acting on the safe side, as I thought, I at first gave a negative. I was assured by our excellent and indefatigable overseer, who had been a considerable time

in the house, that there was nothing to fear, "they would take care of themselves," and that nothing but discontent and grumbling would ensue if they were denied their request. To get the burden off my shoulders, I hastened into town, to Mr. Johnston, our secretary; I found him in the Parliament House, just at the moment *the procession was forming*, stated my dilemma, and immediately had for answer, "I would not like to be you, if you don't agree; you had better give in, they will manage themselves, depend upon it." A general "deliverance" ensued. They got "good places," whereat to witness the whole; some, I think, went even down to Leith, to secure a "stance," and for days afterwards, what each "*saw*" and heard was ample matter for conversation.

By the kindness of Professor Jamieson, as many as chose to avail themselves of it were permitted to visit and examine the larger objects in natural history, in the splendid rooms on the ground floor of the University of Edinburgh—lions, bears, deer, &c. This proved a great treat to about twenty-five, who on two successive mornings spent nearly two hours in examining all they could lay their hands on. They were delighted beyond anything I can describe. The cameleopard, whose towering head none of them could reach, was an object of great interest; no less so some idols from Hindostan, while a mummy secured in a glass case was an object of incessant inquiry, and its un-come-at-able situation brought out many expressions of regret.

Five or seven of the same body went one morning out to the rural village of Roslin, seven miles from Edinburgh, to *view* the beautiful chapel there. One of their number a man of the most cheerful disposition, born blind, and who got joined "for better for worse," with a helpmate under like circumstances—endeavoured to procure a

“stance” in a window for a shilling, on occasion of a public procession ! How this couple could manage may surprise many ; but still more so, when they learn that they also had a boarder—one of the asylum folk—under like circumstances. I can safely say, that had the marriages of the blind turned out nearly as well as this one, it would have been much to their advantage. Their house—and I have entered more than once wholly unexpected by them—was a picture of tidiness and comfort. She had three as pretty children as one could look at, but they all died. She washed, cooked, marketed, in short did everything for all. I have often seen her walking out with a baby in her arms, and always as if going to church,—so clean and tidy—the neat net-bordered cap of the little one “whipp’d up” by her own hands. It was said that his excess of good temper and pleasantry would have been to her an acquisition of which she stood in need.

The recognition of a person by their voice is common to the blind. It is astonishing how this enables them, at a long distance of time, to welcome an old friend. I was passing along a street in Greenock (sixty-five miles from Edinburgh), when I observed about a dozen persons, young and old, assembled round some one sitting on the low wall of some rails. I stopped to see the object of their curiosity. It was a blind man—stout, healthy, and hale, about forty-five years of age. He had a large label hung round his neck, telling a heart-rending story of his being struck blind by lightning on his passage home from the West Indies. His hat was in his hand receiving the trifle of the credulous passer-by. Now, his tale was “truth,” but by no means “all the truth.” I instantly recognised him as some years before one of my own “crew” at Edinburgh, who, for some acts of unruliness, and finally for getting married once more than he should have done—he said in “a

frolic,"—had been expelled the institution. He had travelled a great deal since that—far into England—yet the moment I uttered the words, "Well, Andrew, my lad, how d'ye do?" he popped up his head, exclaiming, "Bless me, Mr. A.——, is that you?—how's a' wi' ye?" I am certain that he derived far more comfort from the information that I was just on my way to the steamer to leave Greenock, than from the trifle slipped into his japanned nor'-wester. Apart from his misdeeds, he was a straightforward, active man,—a capital "messenger,"—and, on the whole, as useful as any we had in the establishment. He was one of two or three I always employed if I wanted a letter or message delivered speedily. I have many times sent one of them to Leith—five miles going and back—and had an answer in an hour and a quarter, or an hour and a-half! Nothing diverted their attention.

Walking along the street at Edinburgh, I observed two of the asylum urchins before me. I saw one of them come bounce against a passer-by. The *other* did the same immediately after—then again the first—each collision being accompanied by a smothered laugh. I at once saw what they were about. Coming up close behind them, I heard the one say to the other—"Noo, Jamie, noo—it's your turn next!" "There," says Jamie, as he directed his whole weight against a coming footstep, while the credulous sufferer soothed his sorrows with—"Poor things—they're blind!" and passed on. Much to their astonishment, they, on their return, found they had not been unobserved.

It has often occurred to me how it should happen that no expression of desire to *see* anything ever escaped their lips. I never heard one of them say—"I wish I could see that as you do." A boy lately went up to the top of the Minster Tower (at York.) He had many times asked

me to let him go. He went, and was quite delighted. But next morning he came to me, saying, "I wish, Mr. A——, I had taken your advice yesterday. It was *so* dull and misty—now this is a delightful, clear morning!" Ghosts, too, and goblins are fully as much the object of their anxiety and aversion as among the inhabitants of the nursery. The idea of Charles I. appearing without his head some night, they believing he had been beheaded in the Manor House, York (his Northern palace, now the school for the blind), was constantly in their mouths, and required no little argument to allay their fears. They many times, as told me, popped their heads beneath the bed-clothes to avoid his Majesty's visits!

On the beautiful eclipse of the sun last year, a few felt afraid, while the greater number, particularly those who had the least glimmer of light, got amply provided with pieces of smoked glass to view the phenomenon. They watched it the whole time, reporting progress to their less favoured companions, who surrounded them for information. These, amongst the blind, are technically yclept "blinkers," and are not accounted as belonging properly to the *right* sort—the totally blind.

One or two, who filled honourable places in the asylum at Edinburgh, I cannot pass unnoticed. The first I shall mention was an old man, named John M'Laren, who, as before spoken of, aided in the instruction of the young. He has now spent the long period of forty-six years in that institution; and, when his character and extraordinary usefulness are considered, it is difficult to say whether he has most benefited by the institution, or the institution by him.

John was, I believe, born blind, or, what amounts to the same thing, became so a few days after his birth. His parents were poor, and how his earlier years were

employed, I know not; but by the time he had attained his fifteenth year (1793), the asylum at Edinburgh was projected, and a very slender beginning having been made, John was amongst the few who entered it on its being opened. On this circumstance, the old man now dwells with peculiar pleasure. "I cam' in a bit callan' (a little boy), an' noo, ye see, am grown an auld man amang ye," he has many times observed to me, when chatting of years gone by,—and this he does with a peculiar elevation of the head, habitual to him when speaking of anything he deems important.

Like all his fellows in the institution, he works nine hours a-day, principally at a machine for teasing hair, wool, and cotton—a process which causes a great deal of dust; but of this I never heard John complain. When his day's work is over, he betakes himself to another employment, in a way which cannot be too much commended, and which has been of essential service to the interests of the institution—the teaching of the young as spoken of before.

There is one peculiarity in his mode of teaching, namely, that he never will take in hand more than one pupil at a time. It has been more than once argued with him that the same repetition would do for one, or ten, or twenty. But no—John does not comprehend such an innovation, and must be allowed to proceed in his own way. At seven o'clock, he searches about for the urchin whose "turn" it is that evening (the younger, and therefore, more unthinking portion, are not very fond of the engagement, but that is nothing to John), and having laid hands upon him, conducts him to the "Machine-room," the apartment where the old man and two others work during the day, and sitting down together, there

they may be heard conning over the oft-repeated passage of Scripture, or verses of the Psalms.

None of the "readings" going on in the house move John from his purpose of Scriptural instruction; he allows it all to pass by as a thing of nought. When he is absent, and that is rare indeed, it is to hear some evening sermon. He cares little about anything but his Bible. Upon subjects connected with that he is quite at home—on almost every other subject comparatively uninformed. His memory, however, takes one singular direction; he picks up and stores in it—it may be supposed almost involuntarily—the merest trifles, and these he can refer to for years back with precision. A question arose as to which of two men came first into the asylum, one of whom had died. John, as in all such cases, was applied to, and, without the least hesitation, he replied, "Ou, Sir, this was it;—David cam' in first, for he cam' in about eleven in the forenoon, an' William about twa in th' afternoon; an' it was an unco wat (wet) day, just seven years past the ninth o' last April!"

This is one of a hundred such registrations, which might be quoted. In the same way, he has chronicled all the texts from which the annual sermons for the institution have been preached, the clergyman who officiated, the sums collected, to a halfpenny, and the state of the weather on the day the collection was made. So long as that mode of aiding the funds continued (for an annual examination has of late years been resorted to in lieu of the sermons), John was invariably mounted in the desk, to act as precentor, or clerk, in raising the tune. He has a good voice still, and, every morning and evening, at family worship in the institution, he performs in the same way.

One source of great anxiety to John is the state of work in the institution. He is always sad, and makes many observations and inquiries, when "it is slack ;" but when a revival comes, which it always does about March, from that to October being the busiest period of the year, his spirits get up, and he works with all his energy. Some of his waggish companions, knowing his foible, frequently annoy him with pretended doubts as to the stability of the institution.

The asylum has for many years had the furnishing of the door-mats for the light-houses in Scotland. The order is generally received about the beginning of April, but, being later about three years ago, some of them put it into his head that there was to be no more of these orders, "as they had *seen* by the papers that a certain economical member of the legislature had been overhauling these spendthrifts,—the Scottish Light-house Commissioners,—an'so, Johnnie, be assured, there's an end to our gude yearly orders !" The poor old man believed this, and every time he could get hold of the overseer as he perambulated the premises, his inquiry was,—“Dinna be offended, Sir, but hae ye heard onything o' th' order yet ? Sure that man might hae let that bit thing escape.” His joy on hearing that the order had at length been received, was in proportion to his former depression.

One anecdote more, and I have done.—A distinguished party visiting the house, were accompanied by Professor —— (of Edinburgh). The Professor knew John to be one of the “lions” of the institution, and, wishing to exhibit him, asked him to repeat the *nineteenth* verse of the sixteenth chapter of Isaiah. John, with his usual elevation of the head, and evidently with a feeling that he could wish to spare the learned gentleman, replied,—“Eh Sir, I wud wi' pleasure, but there's only fourteen

verses in it." It was quite evident, from the *appearance* of the querist, that the question was not put with the intention of catching John: and the Professor heartily joined in the laugh raised by the quaint manner in which the answer was given.

It is gratifying to have to add that the directors, appreciating the merits of this extraordinary man, made him an annual allowance for his almost self-imposed labour in teaching, but he had been engaged in it for a long period ere it was known to them. In addition to this, he had a very handsome silver snuff-box presented to him, with a suitable inscription on it. This heir-loom John only exhibits on "field-days,"—namely, two or three anniversaries still celebrated in the asylum. Of this token of approval John is justly proud, and on these occasions it makes the circuit of the table, every one enjoying a pinch.

But John M'Laren is not altogether singular in the Edinburgh asylum. There are among his companions men who, during nearly the same period, have gained an honourable livelihood by their industry,—supporting wives and families (most of them having such before they were deprived of the blessing of sight) respectably, though necessarily on slender means, a credit to themselves, and the excellent institution which has enabled them to do so.

I cannot close this notice without remarking the contrast which this case presents to one recorded in the Penny Magazine for May, 1833, of "Blind Alick, of Stirling." Both men were born in like circumstances of extreme poverty,—both were noted for astonishing memories,—both exercised these memories on the same invaluable treasure—the Bible. But there the parallel ends.—Unremitting industry, both in manual labour, and in

communicating to others rising around him the words of salvation, supporting himself and wife creditably by that industry; esteemed for his valuable qualities by those placed over him, as well as by his companions and fellow-workmen; distinguished no less for his scrupulous sobriety and respectable appearance on the Lord's-day—mark the one case. While the other, we are told, becoming a kind of wonder, an object of mere curiosity, “lived an easy sort of mendicant life,” as the account informs us, eking out a precarious livelihood by the charity (if such it could be called) of the curious visitor, spending his days in idleness, and by the notice which recently appeared in the newspapers of his death (which happened about April last), not particularly distinguished for his temperate habits.

The next prominent character in the institution alluded to was the teacher, David M'Beath, prominent as to situation and acquirements, but the very reverse as to bodily appearance. He was quite a dwarf, standing only about four feet six inches, a mere morsel, as all his make was in exact keeping. He looked more like a boy of ten or twelve, and that a very thin one. But he was a walking encyclopædia. He had lost his sight very early in life, became an inmate of the asylum, and was at first engaged in handicraft work. But his great extent of knowledge, and a happy mode of communicating it, pointed him out as one well fitted to convey to others what he had acquired himself. He therefore was fairly installed as preceptor, and an excellent one he made. He continued in this office for about twenty years until his death (which was sudden) in 1834. He taught spelling, grammar, arithmetic, geography, history, and writing on twine—the latter an invention, the credit of which he shared with a companion who succeeded him in the schoolroom, until he again was replaced lately by one of their own pupils, a smart boy,

who is in view of becoming teacher in a projected institution in the north. As I have already stated, Dr. Howe, of Boston, engaged one of M'Beath's pupils to go there on the opening of the school for the blind; while another went to the New York institution, and three or four to the Glasgow Asylum. One of these, William Lang, I formerly spoke of as the improver of the arithmetic board. Unhappily the other, a young man of good family, and inferior to none of his companions in talent, did not turn out so well, and had to be parted with. M'Beath's instructions were all given orally, and, from the abundant stores of an unrivalled memory, never failed to make his instructions interesting to the tyros who excelled him physically as much as he did them mentally.

This was, indeed, a source of some annoyance to him. "Boys, whether blind or seeing, will be boys," and the science of "putting old heads on young shoulders" is about as difficult in a blind asylum as anywhere else. Visitors were constantly in the habit of taking the teacher for the taught—a boy—a mere child. Had he not been placed in a situation which daily, and sometimes several times a day, exposed him to the dreaded, though kindly-meant expletive, "Well, you are a very clever boy—how old are you?"—his Zacchean infirmity would have been of little consequence. But, assailed by this mosquito query,—while, at the same time, his sense of politeness (for that, and his corresponding address, were strongly marked) never would allow him to slur a question kindly meant, as he well knew,—he always endeavoured to shape a middle course, by sticking closely to the "standing" answer, "Nearly thirty, ma'am,"—giving, at the same time, his watch-key such a twirl as bespoke to those who knew him the infliction he was undergoing. And one-half of it was yet to come, as immediately on the party clearing

the threshold, and sometimes scarcely that, his ear detected the titter and suppressed ebullition of fun indulged in by his "rank and file." "Order, boys!" "I wish you'd keep quiet, boys!" too often added to the evil, for they knew as well as any that ten years added to the "thirty" would have been nearer the mark.

We had one poet amongst us in the same institution, a very quiet, industrious young man, who lost his sight early in life. His name is Alexander Letham. From amongst many others, the two following little pieces have appeared in more than one of our periodicals. They bespeak a well cultivated mind:—

ANECDOTE FROM PARK'S FIRST JOURNEY IN AFRICA.

"WHATEVER way I turned, nothing appeared but danger and difficulty. I saw myself in the midst of a vast wilderness, in the depth of the rainy season, naked and alone, surrounded by savage animals, and men still more savage. I was five hundred miles from the nearest European settlement. At this moment, painful as my reflections were, the extraordinary beauty of a small moss in fructification irresistibly caught my eye. I mention this to show from what trifling circumstances the mind will sometimes derive consolation, for though the whole plant was not larger than the top of one of my fingers, I could not contemplate the delicate conformation of its roots, leaves, and capsula without admiration. Can that Being, thought I, who planted, watered, and brought to perfection in this obscure part of the world, a thing which appears of so small importance, look with unconcern upon the situation and sufferings of creatures formed after His own image? Surely not. I started up, and, disregarding both hunger and fatigue, travelled forward, assured that relief was at hand, and I was not disappointed."

VERSES ON THE ABOVE AFFECTING INCIDENT.

BY ALEXANDER LETHAM,

An Inmate of the Asylum for the Blind, Edinburgh.

AH! lovely flower, what care, what power,
 In thy fair structure are displayed
 By Him who reared thee to this hour
 Within the forest's lonely shade!

Thy tender stalk, and fibres fine,
 Here find a shelter from the storm;
 Perhaps no human eye but mine
 E'er gazed upon thy lovely form.

The dew-drop glistens on thy leaf,
 As if thou seem'st to shed a tear—
 As if thou knew'st my tale of grief—
 Felt all my sufferings severe!

But ah! thou know'st not my distress,
 In danger here from beasts of prey,
 And robbed of all I did possess,
 By men more fierce by far than they.

Nor canst thou ease my burdened sigh,
 Nor cool the fever at my heart,
 Though to the zephyrs passing by
 Thou dost thy balmy sweets impart.

Yet He that formed thee, little plant,
 And bade thee flourish in this place,
 Who sees and feels my every want,
 Can still support me by His grace.

Oft has His arm, all strong to save,
 Protected my defenceless head
 From ills I never could perceive,
 Nor could my feeble hand have staid.

Then shall I still pursue my way
 O'er this wild desert's sun-burnt soil,
 To where the ocean's swelling spray
 Washes my longed-for native isle.

THE OTHER IS AN "ADDRESS TO THE SUN."

GREAT refulgent orb of day!
 O! what joys thou dost impart!
 O! how sweet thy cheering ray
 To the eye and to the heart!

See the lark with transport rise
 To salute thy early beam;

Whilst thou, in the eastern skies,
Smil'st on mountain, wood, and stream.

Sweetly thou unfold'st to view
Nature in her rich attire;
Giv'st the rose her lovely hue,
And the ruby all its fire.

Yet the scenes thou dost display
Cannot to the human breast
Lasting happiness convey—
Earth is not our place of rest!

Lasting joys are only found
Far beyond thy golden sphere:
There unfading flowers abound—
There the sky is ever clear.

There a brighter sun doth shine,
Which shall cheer the spotless soul
With resplendent beams divine,
Long as endless ages roll!

Amongst the pupils of the school at York, there is one who though of only eighteen months' standing, has shown promise of no ordinary kind—mental, mechanical, and musical. He is just sixteen; came from the neighbourhood of Malton, and is, I believe, "the son of a widow." He comprehends everything, so to speak, at first sight. Possessed of an excellent memory, great perseverance, an ardent thirst for everything new, without at all leaving former acquirements behind, he makes such progress as leaves all his companions at a distance. Basket-making presented no difficulty; and now he is turning out such work of the "fine" description, as would do credit to an able and long standing workman. In geography, a map with eighty to a hundred and fifty places marked upon it, including rivers, mountains, bays, cities, and towns, is only the work of a few hours' lesson. He has thus "at

his finger's end," Europe, England, Scotland, Ireland, Palestine, Yorkshire, and a general map of Scripture geography, from Rome to Babylon. In arithmetic, he is quite master of the four simple, and two compound rules (two hours a week). He, as well as his companions, have their memories brought into exercise daily, by committing a verse of the Psalms, immediately after prayer. Thus, in the period above-mentioned, they have acquired twelve Psalms—about three chapters of the Bible—Watts' Catechism of Old and New Testament names—one half of "Milk for Babes"—a Child's Catechism—about fifteen metre Psalms and Hymns—and have just finished the Church Catechism. The memory has always appeared to me the great substitute, whereby Providence has made up to the blind their privation—and the instrument, which those having the direction of their education ought to bring into constant operation, cautious at the same time to direct it towards the best end.* This youth is no less distinguished for his progress in music.

* While I speak thus of memory, its exercise should ever be accompanied (as in the case of all children) with familiar explanation and constant development of the understanding. If models too are of such great benefit to the seeing in their education, much more so are they to the blind. Witness the delight of the party who visited the museum. Seeing an old sailor, with the help of his faithful dog, pulling along a fine large model of a three-decker, I procured for my pupils—at the small cost of sixpence and a morsel of bread and cheese—a delightful hour's amusement, in examining all the details of this pretty representation of the wooden walls. A considerable number of shells which I had collected afforded great delight, and made their first step in conchology. A whole evening was spent in joyous delight, when I put into their hands a rough model in plaster of Paris, of the ground on which Edinburgh stands—marked as it is by so many peculiarities. This afterwards aided them (at least some) in understanding better than they would otherwise have done the stirring *Tales of a Grandfather*, by Sir Walter Scott, which filled up our evening reading hour for some months.

This is but a study of four months' standing, yet in that incredibly short time has he acquired as much as many children will take a year or two to master. In short, he loves, and is devotedly attached to anything he is engaged in, with the solitary exception of *reading with the finger*. *That* to him, as well as to the *great majority*, is a complete "bore." He *can* do as well as any one, but as he himself says, "it amounts to nothing; besides, *what* book are we to have? Of small type I can scarce tell one letter from another, and the other is *such* a size, that very few books can be expected." He read as well a year ago as he does now—his fingers are hardening with his work. The account this boy gave of himself to me lately was that, "he knew nothing beyond his mother's door—that even hearing the newspaper set him asleep, as he had not a single idea to what they related." The globular form of the earth puzzled him as well as all the rest, sadly. He could not comprehend (and scarcely would believe) that people stood with their heads down at the Antipodes, at which I had fixed a pin, and another at London, to make him understand me. "Now," said he, "sure you are making game, for two gentlemen who had been at Van Dieman's Land, were at my mother's lately, and I'm sure they did not say a word about standing with their heads down!"

Another youngster must not be forgotten. Music alone is all *his* forte—and in that he excels. Passionately fond of it, he never tires, and, while he has in reality pursued it for several years, yet the instruction he has received,—the study of thorough bass by means of the board and pins before-mentioned—improvement in fingering and execution during the eighteen months he has been in the school, has, as it were, completed him; and he has just entered upon his first engagement as an organist, at

Acomb, near York. This boy (for he is only past fifteen) has acquired in the space of time just mentioned, no less than sixteen or *eighteen* pieces of sacred music. I don't mean mere tunes, but choruses, and such like. "The Hallelujah," "The Dettingen Te Deum," "The glory of the Lord," "Comfort ye," "Every Valley," "Coronation Anthem," and "Overture to the Caliph of Bagdad," and other pieces of equally high standing, besides many Psalm and Hymn tunes, any of which he will acquire by their being sung or played over to him three or four times. Now, supposing this youth had had all these, and much more after the fashion of "music in relief for the blind," what benefit would he have derived? None whatever—no, not to the amount of a single bar—it would have proved quite a barrier to his progress had he been put to such drudgery. All he has acquired is by being read to by the teacher, or played over, as it were, sentence by sentence. Unlike the subject of the preceding notice, he progresses in nothing else—at least, only to a trifling degree.

We have some anomalies also. A girl, whom I alluded to before, presents something very extraordinary in her mental conformation. Slow, sleepy, dull, and inactive in the extreme, so much so as to render even knitting almost a hopeless task; she possesses an excellent memory, but anything like explanation she cannot give. Yet, at times, her observations, as in some instances already given, possess point, and indicate a mind that *can* work. Again, while she has the whole of the multiplication table "at her finger's end," she can make no use of it! I spent five minutes (watch in hand) waiting until she could tell me what remained after taking 2 from 41, and ere she could add 4 to the 39, five minutes more elapsed! The simplest question possible—3 oz. at 2d., 2 lb. at 7s., or

any such are to her almost insurmountable difficulties—all kinds of answers are given. She is totally blind—is one of seven children who have only a widowed mother to support them—but owes much to the kindness of a lady in her neighbourhood. She seems never to have been accustomed to any kind of work, her whole hand is quite rigid from want of exercise. To me, she appears an example of what an asylum *might* have done for her, had she been placed there *at an early age*. At home, however anxious a parent may be, the blind have little chance, while on the other hand, in an institution adapted to their wants in all its machinery, they are far more likely to be rendered useful members of society. Nearly the same facts are true of a lad of sixteen here; only he has a better judgment than most, it having, apparently, been assiduously cultivated by his (now deceased) mother. With a wonderful memory, stored with Psalms and Hymns, he can do nothing at arithmetic, reading, geography, and such like studies. Basket-making also was a failure, but he has succeeded better at rope mats.

There is also a chubby-cheeked rosy boy, of nine years of age, who is the oldest of *four* under a like privation. One of them, a little girl, was unhappily burnt to death very lately. Both parents have their sight, as well as their two eldest children. Will it be considered as unworthy of notice that this woman stated to me, that while *enceinte* of this boy, she made acquaintance with a blind woman who became, for many months, her inseparable companion? Although only nine years of age, he has advanced so rapidly in basket-making, and that only in the course of a few months, as far to excel another pupil of thirteen years of age, who has been fifteen months at it. He is equally quick at arithmetic, committing to memory, &c., and is sportive as the day is long. His little

brother is only five years of age, and a prettier little curly-headed fellow is not to be seen. If spared, he promises to become an enthusiastic musician, as no sooner does he enter the room than he wends his way to the piano. He has got a fife at home which he handles a little already. Few things would give me greater pleasure than to see them "endowed" into an institution. I must not omit to mention that their mother has done much for them, not only by drilling them herself, but sending them to school as early as possible. For this alone, they are much indebted to her. Both these children are instances of how necessary it is that institutions for the blind should admit pupils as soon as they display good, promising capacity, instead of putting them off until a certain age has been attained.

I here conclude these observations. My sole motive in undertaking this little work has been the wish to lay before those interested in the blind, or in institutions for their benefit, all the information which I have acquired by ten years' constant and close intercourse with them. I have candidly pointed out whatever I consider likely to retard or limit the usefulness of such institutions. I have considered the various plans now afloat for the intellectual improvement of their inmates; and in doing so I have felt myself compelled to differ, so far as the *indigent* blind are concerned, from those persons now so actively engaged in promoting "Printing for the blind"—but I repeat that, while I do so, I sincerely respect the motive which has called forth those exertions; so far as that has been the zealous wish to rescue those of our fellow-creatures labouring under so heavy a privation, from the listless apathy and hopeless despair to which they were too, too long consigned, from the unfounded idea that their hapless lot admitted of neither help nor alleviation.

Finally, let me hope that no one will be so uncharitable

as to criticise this humble work in the light of a literary composition ;—should any feel disposed to do so, let them recollect in extenuation of its many faults, the *motive* which called it forth, and also, that, in the course of a life devoted to unremitting industry, the writer has found little time for the studies connected with literary attainments.



